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**A YOUNG WIFE'S STORY.**



# A YOUNG WIFE'S STORY.

By HARRIETTE BOWRA.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.



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## A YOUNG WIFE'S STORY.



### CHAPTER I.

“AND so they married, and were happy ever after.” Such were the nursery chimes following the stories of difficulty and opposition with which our juvenile ears used to be delighted. It would have been all wrong if the tangled paths had not led to a marriage. With that we were satisfied. Into the chequered life beyond we never cared to look, nor thought of listening for the echoes of household voices afterwards. Custom has not much changed even now ; narratives of this description are expected

to have the one stereotyped termination. I am, however, about to depart from the rule, and propose beginning where I ought to end, giving the history of a short epoch, the first year of my married life. A very brief narrative will explain how I got into a position attended with strange incidents and ending in a strange way.

On leaving school I went to reside with my mother's brother, Captain Worsley, R.N., with the understanding that I was to assist in the education of his only daughter, my cousin. My small patrimony having been expended on my own education, and having no other relation, I knew I must make my own way in the world. The kind offer of my uncle and aunt, however, did not at first receive all the gratitude it merited. I liked them; it was impossible to do otherwise; they were gentle, kind, and tender, but I wanted a larger arena. My ambition was not of the same sort as that of Julius

Cæsar, as I had read in my history, who said he would rather be first man in a small village than second man in Rome. To be first, like my uncle, in the neighbourhood of a small country town, had I enjoyed the distinction, would have been insufficient for my happiness ; I wanted something less confined. With the insolent ignorance of a pretentious schoolgirl, I despised the simple tastes and occupations of what might be termed pastoral life. My uncle's rough costume and rough ways were not attractive to a girl accustomed for seven years to the style of South Kensington, whenever the young ladies of Mrs. K——'s establishment were permitted to leave the grounds of Chatham House. My aunt was of a different type. She was still young, had a sweet presence, and was essentially feminine, which did not prevent her from tolerating the loud voice, and even enjoying the unpolished jokes of her sailor husband ; nay,

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perhaps was the cause of it, for men and women are usually most attracted towards their opposites, as if some powerful magnet lay latent in extremes of character. Details of amateur farming never wearied her. Crops, weather, and new dressings—the ever-vexing question of wages and labour—were subjects to which she listened with unfailing patience. Was it not her own Richard who talked, and after so many years of silence? What did it matter if they were a little poorer at the end of every year? Richard liked farming; it was his hobby, and occupation is necessary for man. He was not going to sea any more, but would remain with her and Agnes always—always. They were wealthy compared with some, for they had enough, though the land for five years had made no return. Captain Worsley thought it would do well some day; meanwhile those painful partings, which tore the heart of the tender woman

each time he left her to go to sea, were over.

“No more partings, my lassie,” uncle would say sometimes, in his blunt, fond way, but with reverence, too; “no more of them till the timbers of the old ship go to pieces, and I am launched on the broad sea over which there is no return.”

Aunt Edith carried her devotion very far; she allowed her husband to hold what he termed an agricultural council in a sitting-room on the ground floor, which ought to have been the dining-room, and regarded with resigned complacency the long clay pipes which assisted the invited farmers to dole out their experience and superior wisdom in slow returning puffs. The atmosphere of stale tobacco the morning after these periodical entertainments was a little trying.

But she was a good, loving wife, ever putting away all thought of self. Looking



back I see that she had a full reward. Honoured and beloved, her presence was the light of her home. "Where is the mother?" was the first question asked as my uncle's feet touched the threshold, and a word or caress for her the last thought as he quitted the house. She was certainly happy, and needed not the pity I often felt for a life so little suited to my own tastes. I did not then know that woman's highest meed was hers, to reign supreme in her little kingdom, and be the source from whence flows the happiness of those most dear to her.

Our village numbered six spinsters among its inhabitants, representing three households—one composed of three, another of two, and one lady living alone. The latter was a cheery elderly lady of small means and good family, who was often a guest at my uncle's table. On those occasions, if it happened to be in winter, stimulated by an addition to his audience, as we gathered

round the fire, my uncle would relate the wonders of the deep, and detail stirring scenes of wind and flood, where human lives were for hours at the mercy of the wave. According to the number and attention of the hearers, his blue eyes flashed with a brighter sparkle, and—I could not help noticing it—the dangers deepened also! Miss Clayton was an attentive listener, and generally repaid the orator with sympathy and admiration. One evening her usual exclamations of interest were wanting. The graphic tale of “a man overboard” struggling in the waters, and whom it was impossible to save on account of the tempest, was nearly finished, when Miss Clayton surprised us all by asking, “What do gentlemen like best for breakfast?” My uncle turned a sharp glance on her, and then looked at his wife for an explanation of this unexpected digression. Aunt Edith looked puzzled, and she, too, turned her

face towards the speaker, who repeated her question.

"Are you thinking of asking me to breakfast?" said my uncle, who speedily recovered the good-humour that had been slightly disturbed.

"No, no ! not that, but I have a nephew coming to me for a short visit," said Miss Clayton, partly with pride and partly with alarm.

"Well, and if you had a couple of them, what matters?" said my uncle; "the more the merrier."

"But my nephew is almost a stranger; I have not seen him for many years. I wonder what makes him remember me now. There has been so little intercourse between us; we have not met since his mother's death, and that is more than twelve years ago. My poor sister thought so much of him, an only child; it is but natural, only——"

“Every crow thinks her own young one the fairest,” blurted out my uncle, glancing with permissible satisfaction at Agnes; “and I do not see that ours is the worse for the foolish partiality of her old dad—do you?”

The question was addressed to me. Willingly could I confirm his opinion. My cousin Agnes, then only fifteen, in face, mind, and character was the counterpart of her sweet mother. Without great ability, she did her best to learn, and we got on pretty well; I did my best also, and her parents were easily satisfied. Perhaps I was the greatest gainer, for by seeking how to impart the knowledge I possessed to her, I deepened my own. The slowness of her intellect strengthened mine. Having to simplify for others is a sure means of improving one's self, necessitating greater attention to study than might otherwise be given to it. She had a certain taste for

music, which I was able to cultivate to the satisfaction of her father and mother. Altogether, we made a happy quartette ; my uncle, blunt and imperious out of doors, was kind and tender at home, and the ladies of the family were what is usually termed sweet-tempered. If my disposition was less lovable than the others, I had my temper well in check, having early learned the necessity of self-government if I would make my way in the world. More pains had been taken with my principles than with my manners ; I could play a little, sing a little, but was decidedly more meditative than accomplished. Such as I was, I suited my relatives, and was the admiration of my girlish cousin, who would plod on for hours to master a task I had prescribed her. Dear Agnes, how pretty she was, with her soft blue eyes and wavy hair, that gleamed with a golden hue in the bright sunshine, and her rosy mouth, all smiles, as she flitted

about her father—a fairy-looking girl, that seemed the good angel of the household.

Miss Clayton, too absorbed in some mysterious cares to sympathize in the paternal pride, after shaking her head *en philosophe*, added, “Victor Demarcay is half a Frenchman.”

“And if he were a whole *mounseer* he would be no more than a man ; and perhaps not that,” said my uncle in an irascible tone. “We don’t care for him—not a button. Let him come !”

“But I do not know how to feed him,” pursued the lady, with serious perplexity.

“Give him a knife and fork, a good beef steak, a jug of ale, a glass of grog, and see if you cannot make a whole man of him ; and don’t forget to tuck a bib into his waistcoat, lest he should soil his embroidered front.”

This recommendation was followed by a hearty laugh, as my uncle related how he

had sat at table with a lot of foreigners with bibs tucked under their chins, looking like great babies waiting to be fed. Nothing, however, could relieve Miss Clayton's anxiety until my aunt, sympathizing with her trouble, entered into her domestic arrangements, and made a few suggestions respecting the entertainment of this redoubtable nephew.

"How many days does he stop with you?" asked my uncle.

"One, I believe."

"One dinner, one breakfast. Bring him here to dinner, and that will diminish your responsibilities."

There was yet a difficulty. Miss Clayton, feeling that the offhand invitation might offend Mr. Demarcay's fastidious taste, was little comforted by my uncle's hospitality.

"Then give him a mutton chop at home, if my gentleman is more nice than wise."

The captain here swung himself out of the

room, banging the door after him, a fault he often committed when displeased. Aunt Edith's feeble remonstrance, "Oh, my dear!" accompanied by raising her hand to her head, had as yet done nothing towards correcting him, he being by that time the other side of the door. When he returned, with his wrath appeased, he had always something more than usually pleasant to say, and the offence was forgotten. Happy the home where is no "harping" upon an inharmonious string.

What we further heard of Mr. Demarcay was rather interesting. He was of French descent, on his father's side. Though naturalized in England two generations ago, the family had still property in France, and Mr. Demarcay senior usually visited it once a year. This Victor Demarcay, whose coming cast so deep a shadow over his poor aunt's comfort, was the nephew and heir, there being no other male representative in



the direct line, except his own son, a little boy of seven. He was a widower with two children, having lost a very pretty wife four years before. Why he visited his maiden aunt after so many years of indifference and neglect was a puzzle to her. We suggested many reasons which were far from satisfying her, and were all the while needlessly drawing upon our invention, as it turned out that he might be said to come by chance. He was about to visit a small property of his own some distance off, and suddenly remembered that the new railway on which he would travel came within two miles of Miss Clayton's house.

"And when is this paragon of a nephew to honour our poor village with his presence?" My uncle had now returned, and spoke, with his ready smile, as if he had never been ruffled.

"To-morrow evening."

"And you will call upon him, my dear,

the following morning, and ask him to dinner?" said kind Aunt Edith. "You like strangers, and it will be a help to Miss Clayton."

"It would indeed," said that lady, looking considerably relieved; "my Sarah is but an indifferent cook, and you know I could scarcely leave my nephew whilst I superintended her. Besides, your table would be more cheerful, and—and——"

"Well, prepare some roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, my dear," said my uncle to his wife, with twinkling eyes. "We only aspire to the wholesomes. Mr. Demarcay must expect no kickshaws, only plain food and an honest sailor's welcome. If he is too fine to make himself comfortable, why, he will never come again, that's all."

So Miss Clayton went home to make her preparations, happy in the thought that the principal repast of her fashionable nephew would be furnished by a better cook than

her own. Either from the social status of the expected guest, or because his coming was a break in the monotonous life at Weston, my uncle's hospitality broke out on a larger scale than was at first proposed, and he insisted upon inviting our rector to dinner, and the three Miss Dormers in the evening.

"It will please the elder sisters to dress up Miss Araby for company," he said, good-naturedly ; " besides, she is a pretty lassie, and knows how to behave."

"Wait, my dear, until you know that Mr. Demarcay is coming to us. He may decline your invitation after all," suggested Aunt Edith.

We thought so too, and were foolish enough to experience some disappointment at the prospect. The next morning but one my uncle, in trimmer garb than usual, sallied forth soon after breakfast to pay his early visit. The grey coat was changed,

but the corduroys were retained, and a smart blue scarf was knotted sailor fashion round his neck. A black straw hat a little awry, with a strong tendency to fix itself at the back of his head, completed the costume, leaving exposed a well-bronzed face with the honest, open expression of a guileless character. The type to which he belonged is unhappily dying out, the numerous so-called refinements of artificial life being destructive to the simplicity and carelessness that go far to form it. Whatever impression my uncle's visit made on the stranger, his invitation to dinner was accepted, but he told us nothing more.

## CHAPTER II.

I SHALL not easily forget that 25th of January. It was not a cold day for the time of year, and if the sun threw little warmth upon the earth, it fell with a soft brilliance upon the grey branches of the gaunt trees surrounding my uncle's domicile, a pretty residence, approached by a short avenue with a piece of ground in front planted with shrubs and evergreens, a large garden on one side, and farm buildings at the back and on the western end. Rosewood he called it, because, as he said, the name well expressed its twofold pretensions to commodiousness and beauty. Rosewood that day lost something of its usual quiet cha-

racter, besides being nearly, and perhaps for the first time, the scene of contention between my uncle and aunt. To the surprise and vexation of the former, the dinner was to take place in the small room in which we were accustomed to have our meals when alone, the dining-room not having recovered the effects of a recent agricultural council, notwithstanding that all the approved means of fumigation had been applied. My uncle remonstrated, but my aunt on that point was firm. She knew the unpleasantness of stale tobacco, and that her guest, unlike herself, had no one to please by ignoring personal comfort.

"Well, well, I suppose I must yield," said my uncle, after a stout resistance. "The women will be commanders on shore; but if I live a hundred years I shall always say that this Frenchman is a prig."

"You won't do that, darling dad, unless you give up your pipe," said Agnes, throw-

ing her arms in her coaxing manner round his neck. "Ella and I read the other day that no centenarian ever smoked."

In spite of our united remonstrances, Uncle Worsley persisted the whole day in applying the unflattering epithet to Mr. Demarcay, unpremeditatedly impressing us unfavourably with regard to him. Impressions are so easily and sometimes so senselessly made ; happily, one layer soon effaces the other in the soft stratum of the youthful mind, whatever durability may characterize them in the harder nature of our elders. Before the dinner-hour arrived, curiosity had done its work upon the daughters of Eve. My aunt was equally interested with Agnes and myself in divining what the expected guest would be like, having, with all our questionings, only succeeded in wringing contradictory testimonies from my uncle. He was good-looking enough, perhaps, but there was no attraction in a

dandy ; he was not exactly proud, but he thought himself something more than other people ; he was not serious ; he smiled readily enough ; finally, he had a certain cut about him, but—and this my uncle re-echoed—he was an unmitigated prig.

Our good rector arrived a quarter of an hour before the time, and, standing with my uncle on the hearthrug, was giving some fragmentary information about the Demarcays, having slightly known the mother of Miss Clayton's nephew, when at five minutes before five there was a ring, followed by a shuffling of feet and a murmur of voices in an undertone, as that lady took off her clogs before vanishing into an adjoining room to shake out her skirts and put on her cap.

In a few minutes our young maid opened the door, and either forgot to close it upon the ill-matched couple, or wished to gratify her curiosity. We quite pardon Miss Clayton if she looked a little proud as she



entered, with head erect, on her nephew's arm, two inches taller than usual, her shoulders covered with a rich crimson crape shawl that set off her long-worn black silk dress, and certainly had never before been seen in Weston. Mr. Demarcay advanced about three steps with her, then, withdrawing his arm, bent low, as if entering the presence of majesty itself. The introductions were speedily made, and Mr. Demarcay bent lower even than before, and with a grace that could not fail to win the admiration of the ladies, though by my uncle's manner, which was more bluff than usual, I knew he was secretly repeating the epithet he had fixed upon him. My aunt's pretty face, her gentle voice and ways, could not fail to please. Evidently he had expected nothing so sweetly attractive as either mother or daughter, the worthy specimen he had seen in the morning having prepared him for a more homely family.

Very quietly, but very minutely, he examined us all. When my turn was over, and he appeared to be giving all his attention to Aunt Edith, I returned the compliment. What I saw was a man in the very noon of life, on whom care seemed to have set its mark, with dark hazel eyes, soft and pleading, with a strange restlessness in them, as if seeking something they could never find. The long-fringed lids rose and fell, revealing occasionally depths of feeling, or a capacity for sentiment, but the ineffable charm of peace was altogether wanting. When I add that a nameless grace and refinement pervaded his whole appearance and manners, it may be thought that my youthful discernment was at fault, or caught by the first novelty. I think not; a sense of justice was strong in me. To judge impartially was my desire, yet I cannot say that my uncle's pertinacious depreciation of our visitor did not make me more alive to

his merits than I should otherwise have been. Force the pendulum of judgment too much in one direction, it is sure to swing with equal power to the other. The fact is that Mr. Demarcay captivated us all. He took pains to be agreeable, and he was one of those to whom success in such a matter was easy.

Our rector was speedily on a friendly footing with him. He had known his mother, and where there is any good in a man at all, the sacred character of the maternal tie leaves behind a sweetness which never entirely passes away. They talked easily and pleasantly. I am bound to add that I saw no airs of pretension about Mr. Demarcay, nor any approach to the character which my uncle had given him, either at the dinner or in the course of the evening. When the gentlemen joined us the Miss Dormers had arrived, and Miss Araby, more simple and juvenile in her dress than usual, sat on a

footstool near the fire beside Miss Clayton. She rose with playful confusion at being caught in so careless an attitude, but suffered herself to be persuaded to keep her seat, and blushed very prettily when her sisters explained to Mr. Demarcay that the captain spoilt her, and that they did too ; for was she not the treasure of their home, the youngest and last of a numerous family, who, with the exception of themselves, had all died young ? I can hardly explain it, yet Miss Arabella Dormer, though nine years my senior, always looked upon me as an elder. Her light-brown hair was of the same shade as my own, and our height was nearly equal. The rest of our features differed as completely as our dispositions ; her blue eyes were much softer than my hazel ones, and the peach-like tint upon her cheek was more attractive than the colourless white of my complexion. In gentleness of manner, if not in quickness of compre-

hension, she had the advantage of me. I was slow to acknowledge it then, but I lived to learn that the best intentions, and the best judgment when allied to the brusqueness of eager impulse, are not the elements of character which, except in rare cases of appreciation, bring women the loving reverence which seems to me the secret of a noble influence.

What says the poet?—

“Grace was in all her steps, heaven in her eye,  
In every gesture dignity and love.”

Dignity without grace is repellant, though we do not like to say so, and moves us no more than the chiselled marble, which, with all its beauty, is little likely to touch the heart.

When tea had been served Miss Araby was asked to sing, and, after a little show of bashfulness, consented. She made the mistake of selecting an Italian air, with several

lights and shades. Mr. Demarcay must have heard it sung by the best Italian singers ; it could not be expected that he should listen with any feeling but indifference, if, indeed, that far-away look in his eyes did not indicate absence of mind. He smiled applause with the rest as Araby finished, and really looked surprised when, on my uncle summoning me to follow her example, I declined, with a decision that, to say the least, was abrupt.

“Then Agnes shall sing—my little ring-dove will always coo to please her old father.” Turning towards Mr. Demarcay, my uncle added, “She sings well for her age, and has had no other mistress than her cousin.”

My dear uncle was determined to parade the acquirements of his family, utterly ignorant how very limited they must appear in the eyes of a man of the world. There was no refusing him, so yielding with the best grace I could command, I accompanied

my cousin, and was soon obliged, through her timidity, to sustain her quavering voice with my own. The little preliminary scene had probably recalled the absent part of our guest, for he walked towards us when the song was ended, and suggested to Agnes that the best way to gain courage to sing in company was to accustom herself to regard her audience as a garden of stocks.

"And you, Miss Clare," he added, "why would not you sing? So good a teacher cannot be an indifferent performer."

"I really thought that our simple style would not afford pleasure to one who is familiar with the best."

"Ella sings delightfully," put in my enthusiastic cousin, her face turning rosy-red at her own energy.

"She has a warm admirer of her musical talent in you," observed Mr. Demarcay, with a very sweet smile on the lip, yet which in no wise lighted up his countenance.

"I believe you!" cried Agnes, who sometimes slipped into her father's phraseology. "Ella is everything that is good, and the most helpful spirit of the house. Even my father could not get on without her. Besides attending to my education, she keeps his accounts, and knows the market price of wheat, and a number of other things too."

Called away by my aunt, I left the two together, and feared that Agnes took that opportunity of launching into a panegyric on me and my capabilities. Knowing her partiality, I am inclined to think it was not a wise one. She stoutly repudiated afterwards the accusation of having bored him, stating in her defence that after every answer he asked her some fresh question, and seemed more and more interested in her replies.

A tray containing the requisite for preparing my uncle's grog put an end to the evening. The Miss Dormers for this time



preferred keeping their gentility *intacte*, and declined partaking. So after a little time there was nothing else to be done but for the party to break up, the Miss Dormers observing that as they were going the same way, Miss Clayton and Mr. Demarcay might have the benefit of their lantern. A man of Mr. Demarcay's stamp walking home by the aid of the spinsters' lantern was an idea that amused me greatly. The ghost of a smile flitted across his own lips also, though he bowed his acknowledgment of the well-meant proposition. The ladies retired to accomplish a general taking off of caps, Miss Araby excepted, and a pinning-up of skirts, before donning the long mantles of a certain cut adapted for evening weather. When ready it was found that the rector had beguiled the visitor into an evening walk, and that the lantern and the lad who carried it completed the ladies' escort home. With the light that evening Mr. Demarcay

disappeared also. He quitted Weston the following morning, leaving the valuable legacy of a new subject of conversation, which lasted beyond the proverbial nine days. A visitant from a sphere so different from our own could not come and go without kindling both curiosity and excitement.

When all was said twenty times over that could be said about the pleasure Miss Clayton must have had in her nephew's society, the page was turned, and for some weeks onward that lady was continually interrogated as to the probability of his return. That question lost its interest after a while, there being no variation in the answer. Miss Clayton had no idea. Would he not write to her? Miss Clayton thought not; they had never corresponded. The visit was an accident—Weston happening to be on the line of railway where her nephew's property was situated—a part, at least—

which he had not visited since the death of his wife, four years ago. Further, there was nothing to tell ; for want of fuel fire will at last go out of itself. The ephemeral interest in an event which seemed to have no link either in the past or future to connect it with the present died away at last, and Weston was obliged to amuse itself in its old tame fashion. My uncle's eccentricities of speech and manner helped a little, and the local news just then was favourable. There was a sudden arrival of babies in the parish. The wife of one of the small farmers in the neighbourhood had twins, and the same happened in a labourer's cottage, to the amusement of my uncle, who said "it never rains but it pours." The "little strangers" occupied the matrons, the widows, and the spinsters in planning for their welfare. Candle, food, clothing, all was liberally supplied, and their future speculated upon in different ways.

One good lady suggested that the parish should adopt one of them in memory of the event, if the mother could be made willing to part with it. Its history and fate were debated by a select committee of ladies, who consulted together what name would connect the birth of the little stranger with their charitable intentions towards it. The point was never decided, for both the little lives were extinguished, the last only living three days, and the only fact that remained for gossip was, that they were buried in one grave in the churchyard. In the summer of that same year our good rector was taken from us; that was a sad event, as he was deservedly beloved. In the changes attendant upon a loss of that description there is occupation enough for mind and tongue. We must think and speculate who is to succeed, and what sort of a man he will be. It is not, then, surprising that by the autumn Mr. Demarcay's visit had passed

into the chronicles of Weston, and was no more talked of, except at Rosewood, where he still formed for Agnes the ideal hero of a romance.

## CHAPTER III.

It was June, and early in the month, a day so hot that Agnes and I by mutual consent gave up all idea of study. Half reclining on low garden-chairs under the inviting shade of a large plane-tree, we could only make a pretence of reading, and fell naturally into desultory remarks about nothing particular. After one of the many pauses that occurred, Agnes startled me with, "Ella, I know there is something in the wind. Somebody has been quite rampant to-day. I hope it is not going to blow a nor'wester."

"Don't talk in that way, dear, it is not ladylike. You never hear your mother speak so."

“Oh, bother the ladylike; papa often wishes I were a boy. Ella, there is something in the wind, and serious enough to make my dear old father quite cross. I heard mamma trying to smooth him down. In her gentle voice she was bidding him consider all the bearings before he decided—urging him to do nothing rashly, and rather to let circumstances guide him than to attempt to guide them. The conversation was over a letter which came this morning. Shall I tell you what I think?”

Sparing for a moment the rose-tipped daisies which she was ruthlessly snapping off their stems in the soft short turf, she looked hard into my face.

“I think, somehow, it is about you.”

“About me?”

The suggestion banished at once the languor induced by the drowsy idleness of a very hot day, my brain woke up and quickly entered a new dreamland. What

was coming over my life ? Two years and ahalf I had lived at Weston, not altogether willingly at first, but I had grown to like my home. If the idea of change, however vague, brings with it a flutter of excitement, the tremulousness of fear is mixed with it also. The young foot may be firm and elastic, but there is some faltering when it steps upon the bridge that connects the known with the unknown. I hoped, yet feared, that Agnes might be right. Once the question of sending her to school for a couple of years had been mooted, but abandoned. Was it cropping up again ? Her godmother, from whom she had good expectations, had suggested it, and offered to procure me a situation which would at least be remunerative. The captain angrily sent remuneration to the bottom of the sea, and determined that his household should remain unchanged.

Something was, however, going on. Agnes



suspected that it concerned me, and, by a certain wistfulness in her eye, I saw that she was persuaded of the truth of her surmise. My uncle had been out all the morning by himself, and this afternoon he had been closeted with my aunt, an unusual circumstance. Till now I supposed them to be in deliberation over an approaching agricultural council. Were they indeed discussing me and my removal from Rosewood? If so, I knew there was some fancied good in prospect. Not altogether unwilling to make the venture, I yet clung to the tender associations about me. Though our home relationship was so pleasant, it must be disturbed some day. Agnes would not always remain the half-child she was. Time would develop her heart as well as her mind. Forgetting just then what immediately concerned myself, I watched the play of her pretty features as she fell into an unaccustomed reverie, settling in my

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mind that hers was one of those sunny natures which cannot be dulled for long. With me it would be different. For good or for ill, mine was deep and earnest, with a strong bias towards the imaginative. That quality was in full exercise when the soft call, "Ella," taken up again in the loud sonorous tones of my uncle, came across the lawn, and my aunt beckoned me into the house.

"I told you so," said Agnes. "I hope they are not going to send me to school without you."

"If you go at all, it must, I think, be without me, as my school-days are over," I replied, with the dignity of my twenty-one years and a half, rising to obey the summons received.

"My dear," began my aunt with one of her sweet smiles, as I joined her where she was sitting beside her husband, "we have sent for you to—to——"

"Sit down, my lassie, your aunt has something to say to you," interrupted my uncle, getting up from his seat and tramping up and down the little room with quick heavy steps. "I wash my hands of it altogether. No one wishes you a better berth than I do, but really I don't know where you had best sling your hammock."

My aunt held up a warning finger, and then producing a letter with a foreign postmark, asked me to read it aloud. It was from Mrs. Monckton, Agnes's godmother, and pressed the school question again, but under circumstances rather different. The establishment where she wished to place her was willing to take me also as English teacher, "so that Agnes will still have the advantage of her cousin's supervision," wrote Mrs. Monckton.

"You do not object, I see," remarked my aunt, the tell-tale colour of pleased excitement having risen into my face.

"Object! not if the arrangement is agreeable to you;" and then I became conscious that a hesitation on my aunt's part before speaking again had given rise to fear on mine. I liked the idea of seeing the world beyond the circle of Weston, and was apprehensive of difficulty springing up. After waiting a few seconds and exchanging a look with the captain I was unable to understand, my aunt spoke again. "Here is another letter, which may change your feeling on the subject."

As I took the offered envelope from her hand, it seemed that her eye rested on me with anxious fondness, and my uncle, stopping in his walk, pulled himself upright before me with an ejaculation that savoured of displeasure. Evidently something more than ordinary was in question. I began to feel uneasy.

"Go to the window and read it quietly," observed my aunt. A quiet perusal I could

hardly make, owing to the abrupt and unfavourable comments of my uncle. Aunt Edith perpetually stopped them, but the words "prig," "French dandy," mixed with extravagant praises of British honesty, reached my ears so frequently, that I had to read the pages twice before I understood that Mr. Victor Demarcay asked Captain Worsley's permission to pay his addresses to his niece. My first feeling was surprise, my second vexation with my uncle for so persistently nursing a prejudice. One sentence in the letter I long remembered; the full meaning came out afterwards, when breathed upon by time, as invisible ink does when submitted to a scorching heat.

"I find in Miss Clare the qualities most valuable to me in a wife, and with your permission will lose no time in returning to Rosewood in order to urge my suit in person."

The business part was very explicit;

Victor Demarcay had £1000 a year of his own, out of which he would settle £300 per annum on me, and make a further addition when he succeeded to his uncle's property. The great astounding fact was that he should have thought of me at all ; that a man whose social position and antecedents led him into circles very different from ours should select for his wife a country girl without fortune or pretensions to either elegance or beauty.

"Disinterested, is he?" repeated my uncle, bluffly, taking up one of my aunt's comments ; "I call that man disinterested who gives all and gets nothing in return ; not the man who would take our Ella and transplant her into his own home. Why, she would make the sunshine of his life if he were a rich man, and would keep the wolf from his door if he were a poor one."

"Why should not Mr. Demarcay have a little sunshine in his home as well as you?"

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asked my aunt, with a soft smile, laying her delicate white hand within her husband's brown one, in order to secure a hearing, which was rather difficult when he was put out. "He has been four years a widower, and is still young."

"If you advocate second marriages, madam, I will never forgive you, never, though you look at me with those blue eyes till they ache ; but I will take a vast deal of care of myself, and will go on living as long as I can to spite you. The Poppinjay !"

I knew the last word was meant for Mr. Demarcay, and startled my uncle by asking what he had done to offend him.

"Hey-day ! and what have you done, Miss Ella, disturbing the peace of the family by bringing such an affair as this into it ? What have you been saying and doing that this stranger should feel authorized to swoop down upon my household like a bird of prey, and carry off one of its members ?"

“Have you not read, uncle, that as long as the world lasts there will be marrying and giving in marriage?” I said this without reference to myself, merely in the spirit of playful opposition with which I was accustomed to meet many of his statements.

“Why, the girl is daft ; she will actually take this Frenchman if we do not prevent her, when there are so many better lads in England,” said my uncle to Aunt Edith, with a look of dismay that was comic enough to make us both laugh.

“And what qualities has he discovered in her that are not useful to us, I should like to know ?” he continued. “Don’t you see, wife, that it is a selfish proceeding altogether ?”

“Granted, if you mean that in seeking Ella he is pleasing himself and not us ; but who could expect or wish it to be otherwise ? Come, my dear, we will join Agnes, who



is casting wistful eyes in this direction. We will settle her fate, and leave Ella to fix her own. It is easy enough to point out the advantages offered her, but she only can determine whether she will accept them."

The proposition to join Agnes was, I knew, Aunt Edith's *ruse* to get the captain to herself until she had talked him over or persuaded him into neutrality. I saw them walk away in gentle converse, quite certain of the advice I should receive when my turn came to seek it. The present task was to understand myself. The letter left with me I read again and again. The tone was kind—I thought it too flattering, not being aware of having exhibited any qualities in particular, though I knew that Agnes had sounded my praises from the depths of her heart. Sinking my head upon my hands, I endeavoured to examine my feelings. The uppermost was gratification. Without

possessing inordinate vanity, I had enough to feel the full force of the compliment paid me. Wedded life, as I saw it daily represented, was a beautiful picture. My uncle and aunt, without any pretensions to romance, were truly a happy couple, her gentle influence subduing in a proper degree the roughness of his hardy manhood. This kind of existence, transplanted into scenes of a less monotonous character, seemed the one for which I was best fitted. Not having wasted any portion of my youth in romantic dreams, nor frittered away my feelings in sentimental attachments, they were fresh and genuine, and would quickly kindle into enthusiastic regard if centred upon a worthy object. Mr. Demarcay's soft manners and melancholy eyes had already created an impression in his favour, which Agnes, in her childish admiration, had unconsciously strengthened. Had he come among us again as a stranger I should

have welcomed him with pleasure; it was not then so inexplicable as my uncle supposed, that I should be willing to receive his addresses. In my short life there had been no playing at sentiment, nor did I delude myself with a false one now. Quite real and very charming was the vision, now rising before me, of merging my own life and interests in those of another. I could not understand why Mr. Demarcay had chosen me; but as he had done so, I was determined to do my best to render his choice a wise one. The widowed home should again be filled with sunshine, if in my power to create it, and his motherless children should find a tender parent in me. The good I meant to do took such possession of my mind as to steel me against the covert reproaches and inuendoes that my uncle, in spite of his wife's repression, could not help uttering from time to time. It was his positive command that nothing should be

decided that evening—that I should sleep upon it, as he expressed it, and my decision in the morning, if unbiassed by any one, he pledged himself to accept. Aunt Edith and Agnes looked at me with loving, anxious eyes, that said a great deal; and Uncle Worsley, by detached, irrelevant sentences, was continually departing from his own prescribed rule of conduct.

“Alone, lassie; go to your room alone, and shut yourself in. Neither of my women-kind shall meddle with a hornet’s nest,” said he, as he gave me the nightly kiss, tenderer now than ever.

It was very early next day when Aunt Edith entered my room, sent by her husband to know the result of my nocturnal deliberations.

“What is your advice, Aunt Edith?” I asked.

“I may not give any; rather tell me what is your resolve, my dear? Your uncle will

decline or accept Mr. Demarcay's visit according to your wishes."

Already I had made up my mind, but I wanted a word of encouragement which might shift a portion of the responsibility upon the shoulders of another.

"Were it Agnes instead of Ella, what would you say?"

"Agnes is so young, that the possibility of a wooer presenting himself for her has never entered my head, but I am fain to say that I like Mr. Demarcay."

So did I. The tall, easy figure stood in its negligent grace before me, and I seemed to read a tale, interesting and not altogether sad, in those deep earnest eyes, as they would be when they next met mine. I was not in love, but fairly on the road to being so, and found it no light task to face my uncle's undisguised disapprobation while expressing my willingness for Mr. Demarcay to receive an invitation to Rosewood. He came imme-

diately. Long, long ago, so it seems to me, now that I am counting time more by events than years—now when human passions that sweep so fiercely over the noonday path have sighed and sobbed themselves to rest. When the haven is entered the storm-tossed voyager counts not the troubles passed, or only reviews them as beneficent waves that bore him homewards. In gathering up some of life's lessons, I find one most useful, but often overlooked: Not as we wish or will, but as we need, God gives to all equal materials for happiness—the skill to carve and shape and turn them to equal account is ours to acquire. Failure comes through pride, or ignorance, or indolence. Shrinking from exertion because painful, we sit down and fold our hands, and call that yielding to necessity, forgetting that we have each to enter upon a battle-field where there is no victory without conflict, and that the struggle must come, either with ourselves or others.

But why moralize thus? What young heart has faith in the counsels or experience of an elder? Grey hairs do not always give wisdom. The patriarch said so, and it is true enough. It is truer still that the young do not care to read the signboards put up by other wayfarers to turn them from a path that looks inviting to the unpractised eye. They would rather venture unwarned and risk the danger than steadily prepare to meet it.

Whilst the world lasts others will do as I did; they will take the advice which best suits them, and exalt the virtues most easy to acquire. Between a sense of duty and a persevering endeavour to carry it out lies a great gulf, very difficult sometimes to traverse. Yet those who have the courage to try, though starting with a faltering step, will eventually attain a rest and peace more complete than they even contemplated. Some years ago I could not have spoken with such

decision on the subject, though a germ of the happy truth was hidden somewhere in my heart, and stood me in need when sorrow came.



## CHAPTER IV.

OVER this part of my history I shall not linger. Mr. Demarcay's visit, in the celerity of its results, had something of the character of Cæsar's movements. He came and conquered. The six weeks' courtship was varied by many partings and many meetings, for his stay with us rarely exceeded two days at a time, and I may add that these frequent absences served to maintain at a high pitch the excitement of my new position. There was this anomaly about it, that when he was present I seemed to miss something out of my cup of happiness which was not wanting at other times. When he was gone I found so much to think of,

besides making preparations in the way of dress and purchases, that there was little time for speculative meditations. Evidently he had it much at heart to interest me in his children, who were very dear to him. Their tender age and good dispositions would, he said, make their training easy, and he was persuaded that I should fulfil well the duties I undertook. This was flattering, accompanied as was the expression of this conviction with what might almost be termed grateful glances from those expressive eyes of his, never entirely the same. Of his uncle, from casual words dropped from time to time, I stood a little in awe, but Mr. Demarcay assured me that he was a knight of the old school, and that I should find him all courtesy.

The important day arrived, making a great fête for the people of Weston. My uncle, submitting to necessity, was tolerably good-humoured, and eclipsed himself in compli-

mentary phrases over Miss Clayton's new grey silk dress. The Miss Dormers wore black ; they hoped it was no bad omen, but they never meant to relinquish their usual garb except when Araby married. They were, however, kind in their way ; they wished me much happiness, brought me a present of a small *étui*, containing scissors, needles, and a thimble, and permitted their sister to act the part of bridesmaid. I had two, Araby and Agnes, the latter looking simply beautiful, and the other decidedly simple without the former adjective. The knot was tied : I recollect feeling a fear and flutter as the service went on, though my external manner was calm enough. When the new rector closed his book and passed into the vestry there was a pause. Though just declared man and wife, Victor Demarcay and I stood apart, motionless, before the communion railings, until some one whispered, "Follow into the vestry."

My husband started as I lightly laid my hand upon his arm, bowed, and led me in the direction indicated. The signatures were made in due form, Mr. Demarcay was congratulated, and I received a torrent of good wishes from friends that crowded around us. Next came the walk down the church over green leaves and flowers. This time I had not to give my hand, it was taken; and as one after another whom we passed claimed a smile, I noticed that Mr. Demarcay bent his head with almost elaborate courtesy. There was no general breakfast until after we had left. We had to catch a certain train and had a drive of two hours in prospect, it having been arranged that we were to take the railway at a town three stations farther than Weston.

My uncle seated me in the carriage after a loud volley of parting advice, ending with the truism, "No craft sails always in

summer seas ; look out for a few breakers sometimes."

"Which will not be dangerous," added the gentle voice of my Aunt Edith, in an encouraging tone.

"Come back to us very soon," said Agnes, pressing forward to have the last kiss. In another minute Mr. Demarcay was seated beside me, and the horses soon trotted us away from Rosewood, and out of sight of the friendly faces watching our departure from its pretty porch.

The old ties were severed and the new life had commenced. My voice it was that broke the first silence, which seemed very long. On the way to Weston, and passing through the small town, many loiterers and spectators on the road and from the windows were looking on, turning the event into a brief holiday. For want of something else to say, I entertained my husband by giving short sketches of the characters and circum-

stances of the principal inhabitants of some of the houses we passed, to which he listened with polite attention. When all were left behind, and when we had gone some distance beyond the chance of meeting my acquaintance, feeling I had done enough, I stopped in my narratives, and Mr. Demarcay, throwing himself back with an air of weariness, gave a real, true, unmistakeable sigh. Yielding to the first impulse, I slipped my hand into his, and was rewarded by a smile, which would have warmed my heart but that his face was overcast by an expression of sadness that pained me to the heart's core. When my fingers soon afterwards fell from his nerveless grasp, I took care not to repeat the caress, though my husband on his part was equally careful not to let the conversation flag, and entertained me so fluently with tales of Nora and Hubert, Colonel Demarcay and Lorndale, that our arrival at the station where we were to join the railway took me

by surprise. Two days we were to spend in London, and then proceed to Lorndale, where Colonel Demarcay was anxiously waiting our return. Though the beginning of August is a dead season in London, I found plenty to see and plenty to do. My husband accompanied me to the principal shops where the first Mrs. Demarcay was accustomed to deal, and recommended me to procure all I thought necessary for a long residence in the country, adding that his uncle was very particular in matters concerning a lady's toilet.

"The dress you have on, though unexceptionally neat, would not be quite to his taste," he continued, in answer to my silent surprise, for I thought I was well-dressed, my aunt having taken pains to give me as good an outfit as the family means allowed.

"I must conduct you to a fashionable milliner and dressmaker, and afterwards you will be able to manage for yourself."

The milliner's business was soon disposed

of; Victor chose me two bonnets, which I thought very expensive, and ordered them to be packed and sent to the hotel. With the dressmaker there was not so much despatch. By good fortune the head of the establishment had not left town, and after some delay, came forward at Mr. Demarcay's request. I own to feeling a tinge of awkwardness all over me, as well as astonishment, when introduced formally to Madame Renard as Mrs. Demarcay, and heard for the first time that I had come to consult her respecting some dresses that were wanted immediately.

"Dinner or morning dresses?" asked the lady, turning to me. Madame Renard must have thought me what I was—a bride from the country—for instead of answering, I looked at my husband, wondering over my hitherto undiscovered wants.

"You require two of each immediately, do you not?" he answered quickly. "You



can arrange with Madame Renard for others at your leisure. I am going a little farther, and will return for you in about an hour's time. Madame Renard will, I am sure, have plenty of things to show you." Though extremely ludicrous, it is perfectly true that I felt somewhat shy at being left alone with this grand, fashionable woman, the more so as I knew that she and her assistants were taking no approving survey of my appearance.

"We will begin with the morning dresses," said Madame Renard; "a grey silk I should recommend, and one of the new fancy fabrics. Juliet, my dear, bring forward some of the last novelties we have received. It being a kind of mid-season now, our choice is more limited than usual; but I think I can suit you easily. You will not be so difficult to dress as the former Mrs. Demarcay. She was a little fairy creature, for whom every fashion had to be

altered or subdued—a very charming little lady, although she had not the dignity of carriage that you have. She was a blonde, and very pretty. I think this shade would set off your complexion to the best advantage, or this; your figure would bear it. Pardon me for saying so, but few ladies have a form so perfectly moulded as yours. Made as I intend it to be, you will look remarkably well in it. Shall we say these two?"

The lady talked so fast as to leave me no room for reply, even if anything were left for me to say; but the idea of resisting or contradicting this elegant woman on her own platform never occurred to me. Where I have knowledge I can upon occasion be bold enough to have an opinion, and express it also; but ignorance here kept me dumb. There was nothing better than to acquiesce in the decision of the autocrat. Silks and gauzes were next brought forward for dinner

dressess. They were a blaze of beauty, and were put down before me with such unhesitating certainty of being accepted, that I scarcely liked to bring forward my objections. They were too showy and, I feared, too expensive. Would it be losing caste to ask the price? I put the question to myself doubtfully at first, and then fell back on my common sense for the answer. I had always been accustomed to limit my expenses to my means, the true measure between buyer and seller, and was still the same Ella. Writing Demarcay after my name should not make me less true than I was before.

"What is this a yard?" I asked boldly, touching a material that seemed plainer than the rest.

"What is this a yard, Miss Elliott, or rather what would be the price of the dress?" said the great lady, superciliously, to one of the "young ladies" who were in

attendance. A pause followed, and soon I was electrified to hear that the dress, well trimmed, might be twenty-five pounds, or twenty-three pounds if made more simply. To know that a silk one would be more still, bewildered me. I turned over the specimens before me, unable to come to a decision, wishing for Victor, and wondering when he would come. Not daring to choose, and thinking I was going through a penance for which no gratified vanity in the future could compensate, I asked for others, with the same result. Madame Renard was plainly impatient, and her young people were exchanging smiles not flattering to me. In desperation I came to the conclusion, that being ordered to choose two dinner dresses, I might venture to take one at the high figure, and forego the other. Hastily fixing upon the least showy in colour, I expressed a wish to have it made simply, "and the others also," I

added, remembering, with painful compunction, that I had already chosen two without knowing the price.

"They are to be sent to Lorndale as soon as finished?" said Madame Renard with a stereotyped smile.

"As soon as finished," I repeated.

"And put down to Colonel Demarcay's account, as usual, I suppose?"

Here was a fresh dilemma. How could Colonel Demarcay, whom I had never seen, be charged with the expenses of my wardrobe? My flushed cheek must have answered before I found words to reply.

"I beg your pardon; I understood Mr. Demarcay that our former relations were to be renewed. Colonel Demarcay was much displeased if he did not receive our account before the end of the year. Of course, I wish to do what is most agreeable to you."

"Send the account to my husband—to

Mr. Victor Demarcay—if you please,” said I, thinking that here, at least, there could be no mistake.

“And you will not select the second dinner dress to-day?” said she, in an insinuating tone; “it would save trouble, as all could be sent together.”

“Not to-day,” I answered, then passed into a small elegant cabinet adjoining, where I was invited to have my measure taken. The process, though really short, seemed long, as I was anxious to get away, and vexed, moreover, at being left alone to bear the attacks so difficult to repel—an unreasonable displeasure, for what could be more essentially woman’s work than the choice of the raiment that is to adorn her? It was strange, yet true, I had no natural taste for the vanities and gauds that usually form an important item of the enjoyment of a woman’s life. On returning to the room where I had left Madame Renard,

I found her in earnest talk with my husband, who was contemplating with his usual seriousness some silks of a rich and handsome texture.

"Perhaps you can persuade Mrs. Demarcay to take this," said Madame Renard, producing one of the number. "I am sure it will be very becoming to her. It is true, her figure would set off anything, but we profess to improve upon symmetry, and sometimes even to paint the lily."

The attractions given me by Madame Renard were entirely new to my mind. I prided myself upon being neat and trim, but went no further. The weakness of woman was strong upon me then, for though I gave no credit to her words myself, I was inconsistent enough to rejoice that they were spoken before my husband.

"Why will you not have this dress, Ella?" he asked, seconding the dressmaker's suggestion; "do you not like it?"

"I have chosen three, and thought that would do," I faltered.

"Only one dinner dress, and that a very plain one," repeated the pertinacious lady.

"You had better take another; the colonel is so particular," observed Victor.

"And I am to send the account to you, and not to the colonel, as before?" said Madame Renard, when the choice had been made.

"And why so?" asked my husband, a little sharply.

"I thought it better—what you would naturally wish," I stammered, feeling more disconcerted than I cared to show.

"To Colonel Demarcay, as usual," he replied, stiffly; and bowing to Madame Renard with marked courtesy, as if she had been one of the great ladies of the land, he gave me his arm with studious politeness.

"I have not, I think, properly explained



to you that Lorndale, being my uncle's property, all the expenses of the establishment are defrayed by him," said Victor, when, clear of Madame Benard's premises, we were driving through the park.

"But surely it is on you, and not on your uncle, that your wife must depend! You know that I have no money of my own, and I could not accept it of a stranger."

"It is to my uncle that we must all look—myself as well as my children. You cannot be the exception without dooming yourself to a poverty I was very far from contemplating for you."


He spoke calmly and looked kindly, depriving me of any excuse for showing the ill-humour I really felt. Left to myself, I could do with so little; it was therefore a great mortification to have expenses thrust upon me for which I must contract obligations to a perfect stranger. It must have

been from a spirit of revolt that the following day I turned a deaf ear to my husband's recommendation to wear one of my new purchases, and travelled to Lorndale in a bonnet of Weston manufacture !

## CHAPTER V.

It might be about four o'clock when we drove under the large gateway that led by a broad carriage-road to Lorndale. Fair and bright was the view, of which I had several glimpses through the leafy avenues. Summer yet lingered in the sweet perfume of the air, giving as it were the hand to autumn, which was beginning to turn into golden brown a few tops of trees and branches on which the sun was shining. Shadows fell over long stretches of grass which only here and there looked green, the long-continued heat having parched and dried the ground. Emerging from under the trees, the road made a slight ascent

towards the house, which but for that would in reality, as well as in appearance, have stood in a hollow, being closed round on three sides by elevated ground, richly wooded. At this time of year the afternoon in the country has about it an expression of quiet and repose not found in the flush and glory of a midsummer's day, and particularly soothing to tried or agitated nerves. There was hardly time to observe the large, heavy-looking mansion we were approaching, when the carriage rolled swiftly up to the door, which flew open ere the wheels had done creaking on the gravel. Before me was a hall, looking something like a conservatory, so gaily was it filled with flowers of many colours. Thankful was I for one pleasant impression, my thoughts and anticipations on the road not having been altogether *couleur de rose*. Victor was kind, but silent; the magnetic chain of mutual affection over which our idlest



thoughts travel so sweetly and unrestrainedly from one to another had not yet drawn us into the intimacy of free communication. My heart was still asking for something it had not found, and wondering if it were an inevitable fact to find the husband less *empresé* than the suitor. I could not say that he had been a cheerful companion, nor yet that my efforts to amuse him had been altogether unsuccessful. There was, however, some compensation in the ring of pleasure in his voice as he uttered the word "home." Courage! The man who loves his home and his children could not be far from meriting the affection I had begun to give, with my undoubting confidence, when I pledged my faith to him three days ago.

A gentleman with grey hair came into the hall as my foot crossed the threshold. It was unnecessary for me to be told that it was Colonel Demarcay. *Grand*

*Seigneur* was stamped upon his lofty carriage in signs that could not be mistaken, as well as a consciousness of high descent upon his clear-cut features and emphatic face. At the first glance it had an aggressive character, but when the lips broke into a smile, quickly extending to the pale grey eyes, I wavered in my impression. Victor was tall, but Colonel Demarcay was taller, notwithstanding a slight stoop from the shoulders when he was at rest. Making a few stately steps towards me, he drew himself up to his full height before bending low, so that I should not lose an inch of the compliment intended to be paid me. A second bow not quite so low brought his lips in contact with my hand, gracefully raised by him as soon as stretched out. This was my reception, with the addition of a word or two of grave welcome. The ceremony over—for ceremony it appeared in contrast to the hearty and homely ways

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of my uncle—Colonel Demarcay drew my arm under his and paraded me through a suite of rooms, which he courteously hoped would soon gain a more cheerful appearance, through the presence and elegant litter that a lady usually collects about her. Having taken me through two sitting-rooms, a large saloon or ante-room, and the dining-room, he brought me back to the one first entered, and, seating me in state, began a string of polite inquiries about my journey, my relatives, and Miss Clayton. These subjects were scarcely finished when my husband entered, saying, with a look of disappointment, “Hubert and Nora are out. It was thoughtless of nurse not to make a point of being home in time to meet us on our arrival.”

“Mrs. Demarcay can perhaps wait,” said the colonel, inclining towards me with a peculiar expression of the eye.

Of course I could wait; but I, too, re-

gretted the children. Their presence might have modified the frigid atmosphere of that first half-hour at home. Home ! I could not realize that the word had any particular signification for me ; the sweet repose and careless ease of which it is usually the pledge and representative did not appear to belong to the richly adorned apartments to which I had been introduced. After fretting a little longer at the non-appearance of the children, Victor proposed my going upstairs to become acquainted with my rooms. Arrived there, he rang the bell, which was answered by a respectable-looking woman, nearly thirty, with a pale, grave countenance, who welcomed her new mistress with a deep curtsy, and then began in a business-like way to remove the things I had laid down. In the cabinet adjoining were my boxes, of which I gave her the keys—not without reluctance. My aunt and I had packed them ; it was in accordance with



my tastes as well as with my old life that I should undo them. Deprived of my occupation, after Victor left me I stood at the window, looking out on the dusky woods that bounded my view and on the lengthening shadows that were stealing over the smooth turf, thinking—of what? Of the change, the total change of life and habits, on which I had so boldly entered. I had left my uncle's roof, where heartiness with homeliness, always welling forth, made a monotony not unpleasant, for the independence and satisfaction of a home where I hoped that the yearnings of my heart and intelligence would both be gratified. Had I been hasty? It takes years to form a friendship; is it well or wise to be content with only a few weeks' acquaintance before concluding a marriage? A stranger but yesterday, and joined in indissoluble bonds to-day! The inconsistency struck me with force, almost with shame; and yet, from

the first day of meeting, Victor Demarcay inspired me with an interest which added a fresh stimulus to our daily routine. Had I made a mistake? had I left the glowing sunshine of Rosewood for the sombre grandeur of Lorndale? was I like the mariner's guide, turning from the glorious vegetation and fragrant odours of the south and east to the chilling frosts of the polar regions? Before I could heartily repudiate the unwelcome thought, voices rose from the terrace below, and I heard my own name. I had been more or less than woman had I retired purposely not to hear. Instead of that, when conscious of the subject of their conversation, I leant forward that Colonel Demarcay or my husband might become aware of my presence, and with that effort my conscience was satisfied. Neither, however, looked up, but continued conversing audibly as they slowly strolled up and down, making a halt and then turning just before

reaching my window. The speaker I first heard was my husband, answering apparently some remark made by his uncle.

"You might, I think, be satisfied, even if she is not altogether what you expected. Remember, I married to please you, not myself."

"If you will take the trouble to examine the family portraits, you will perceive that the ladies who have had the honour of bearing the name of Demarcay have hitherto been fine women, or distinguished in some way or other, save and except one exception, which we will not discuss. There is nothing remarkable in this one; I should not even have looked at her twice. Really, Victor, you do not know how to choose a wife."

They turned as this was said, and I could see my husband raise his shoulders as if not deigning any other reply. When they next approached Victor was speaking again.

"I am sure you will like her. She is clever and cheerful ; just the companion for you. Before long you will discover that I have exercised a sound judgment in placing her at the head of your house. Dress and fashion can be bought, but a lady capable of entering upon topics that please you is not manufactured by dressmakers nor always found in the social ranks from which you would have me choose. Besides—— "

The retreating steps prevented my hearing more, even had I been capable of distinguishing sounds clearly. The noise in my own ears, and the blood receding from my heart to flush my face, neck, and brain, left me in all else a mere statue, gazing into space where I discerned nothing, felt nothing, but that I had been smitten a severe blow, from which every part of me was aching. Presently two figures walked across the lawn. Though my eyes were riveted upon them as moving objects, no thought

for the moment connected them with the cruel revelation I had just heard. It is true Victor spoke in my favour the cold language of approbation, but even with the words upon his lips he relegated me to another. I had been married and brought to Lorndale to please Colonel Demarcay, and had failed in that. To be his companion was the distinction conferred upon me, and to be fitted for it by my mental faculties and acquirements was my highest praise. The strange words just heard, and strange position they created for me, were filling my thoughts, when a voice suddenly spoke near me, "Is there nothing more?"

"Nothing more—surely that is enough!" I replied, bitterly, as the question reached my ear but not my intelligence. A little cough immediately made me aware that I was at cross purposes with my maid, who wanted to know if there were more boxes to unpack. How long had she been there,

and what had she seen or overheard ? That she knew something of what was said below I gathered from the pink colour on her cheek, and, a studious avoidance of looking at me when I told her that a few dresses were coming from Paris. How I then loathed the idea of decorating myself with the gifts of Colonel Demarcay, and felt complete indifference about improving the impression I had made upon him. Adams seemed of a contrary opinion, and was inclined to rule over me on that point.

“ I shall take the prettiest of your white muslins for to-night, ma'am. I see you have a paper of coloured ribbons ; if you will allow me to choose the mauve, I can make up a few bows and trim the dress before dinner ; it will look very nice then.”

I thought it pretty enough as it was ; but having no heart to oppose or discuss, I asked her to give me a book, and sat down at the farther end of the room, glad of a pretext

to dispense with either looking or talking. After a while she proposed arranging my hair, an operation to which I meekly submitted, and took no notice until a triumphant "there!" made me look up to see what she had done. So complete was the change that I hardly recognized myself.

"Some people look better for simplicity and others require style. I have had great experience, ma'am. If you would but smile you would be quite handsome; you do look unearthly serious," said Adams, surveying her elaborate work with something more than complacency.

The dress I found had undergone as great an alteration as myself. Looped into a new form, and adorned with bows tastefully placed, it seemed as if I were going to a ball rather than to a quiet dinner with my husband and his uncle. To please Adams I stood before the cheval glass and suffered her to turn me round, so gratified was she

at the result of her handiwork. Chancing to look back on leaving the room, I saw her eyes following me. Surely their expression was one of pity. Was it for what she had overheard, or was she better informed than I of the shoals and quicksands awaiting me ?

Below both the gentlemen were present when I entered. I had scarcely made a step forward when Colonel Demarcay, casting a quick glance and a peculiar smile towards my husband, approached, and, taking my hand, led me to a seat, recommencing the same string of polite remarks respecting the journey which I had heard before, interspersed now with hopes, very prettily expressed, that the arrangements made for me met with my approbation. Then, ere the deepening shadows prevailed, he wished, he said, to point out a very favourite walk of his, which was particularly beautiful in the morning.

“That must be your first ; I wish you to be equally pleased with it.”



A very perceptible increase of warmth now pervaded his manner. Though the walk in his company had not for me the attractions he seemed to expect, I could not do otherwise than follow him to the window and listen to his long preamble of wishing to make Lorndale more than agreeable to me; but when my husband joined us, and rested his hand upon my shoulder, the patience for which I had been struggling abandoned me. With a quick movement I shook it off. Ah, me! I was for the moment as deceitful as I thought him, for I gave an appearance of attention to the colonel, though my heart was boiling and surging, beating with a passionate resentment that I feared would master me altogether.

"There are the children!" exclaimed Victor. At that opportune moment, when I think neither of us knew what to say next, the nurse entered with her little ones. The three stood still in the middle of the room,

and all eyes were fixed on me. The father had already given and received his caresses ; this visit was for me. "Go and shake hands with your——"

Here my husband stopped, and Colonel Demarcay filled up the blank. "Come and speak to your new mamma."

"She is not my mamma," answered Hubert, eyeing me with a curious defiant expression, his fair skin and long, curling, light hair contrasting by their almost feminine beauty with the erect, manly bearing of the boy. Had I not known that he was only seven, I should have taken him for a year older at least. There was a striking difference between him and Nora. Though only separated by a year in age, there was the appearance of three in size and character. The tiniest and smallest of children, looking scarcely four, though turned six, she clung timidly to the nurse's skirts, half hiding herself behind them, and peeped

forward. The dear little face was quite a picture, with dark rings of hair on her low forehead, and long curls falling over her shoulders.

"Come, Hubert, won't you say, 'How do you do?' to me?" I asked, leaving the window and sitting down some little distance off. Instinct told me that any decided advances to the sturdy little rebel would only compromise me in his eyes.

"Come, my dear, shake hands with me, and then you may go back to the nursery," said I. The child strode a few steps closer, and without taking my extended hand, looked hard at me, and knitting his brows, asked abruptly, "Why do you say, 'My dear'? you do not know me, nor I you."

"Ha, ha! Mrs. Demarcay," laughed the colonel, "you will have something to do to teach the little savage the language of politeness."

"He seems to possess that of truth, which

is a better foundation. Where the basis is sound, there is not much difficulty in making a good superstructure. I hope I may find it so. You may go now, Hubert," I added, without again holding out my hand; "perhaps we shall be better friends tomorrow." I meant to try to attract Nora, but the little girl saved me the trouble. Gently she crossed the floor, and now twined her tiny fingers round mine. "Good little Nora," said I, taking her on my knee and kissing the rosebud of a mouth that she raised towards me. I was not allowed much time to caress her. Hubert, who looked on for a second or two with a proud, hard face, soon interfered.

"Come, Nora," he said, roughly pulling her away, and still regarding me with a look that said, plainly enough, he did not mean to surrender.

"Gently, gently, little man, you must be gentle with your sister."

Pushing back his hand, as I gave the mild reproof, and kissing Nora again, I set her down. Immediately she ran to her father, who, lifting her in his arms, carried her out of the room, followed by Hubert, who went sulkily and slowly after the nurse. The latter had not spoken ; she made a low curtsy as she turned to walk away, directed more to the colonel than to me, but I had seen a look exchanged between her and her elder nursing that made me more than doubt if she were a suitable person to be entrusted with so sacred a charge as the care of young hearts and minds. When my husband returned we went to dinner. No reference was made to the children.

There was much to do in their training, and obviously no efficient help was to be obtained from either father or uncle ; the former seemed weakly indulgent, and the latter was evidently devoid of those sympathies that make children tolerated when

troublesome. These considerations, however, did not daunt me. With them I could grapple. Annoyances might spring up in the discharge of duties such as those, without making life either hard or cheerless. Happiness does not die out of one's existence for a few roughnesses which time, strength, or perseverance can overcome. Let the heart have its food, and the yearning spirit feel some breath of tenderness diffused over the daily routine of its occupations, and it discovers many a bright gleam to enlighten darker paths than mine promised to be. Take these away, and though the discipline may be needful, though it may even be necessary, thus harshly to purify us from the taint of egotism, of vanity, and earthliness, the process is a painful one. The question rose in hard distinctness, What was really before me? I had that day weighed both husband and children, and found little of the nameless

charm that affection gives. There yet remained Colonel Demarcay. What could he be to me? Though he had surprised me by his great powers of conversation throughout this first dinner at Lorndale, and by his evident determination to make himself agreeable, his first expressions of disapprobation were still fresh in my mind. It was not these expressions, however, that raised within my breast the exceeding bitter cry which I found so difficult to stifle.

## CHAPTER VI.

CARRYING out the early habits to which I had been accustomed all my life, I was dressed a good half-hour before the family breakfast. Feeling that the sooner I took the place my husband was anxious for me to occupy, and evinced a mother's interest in the children, the better he would be pleased and the easier would be my duties, I resolved to pay them a visit before going down.

"Adams, will you show me the way to the nursery?" I said, as she was leaving the room.

"Surely, ma'am," was the ready answer; but something in her eye and in the light pressure of her lips together made me sus-



pect that I should not be altogether a welcome visitor. The nursery was not near my room ; first there was a long corridor to descend, and then a short stone staircase to mount, which also led downwards into the court below, so that those who occupied that wing could be shut off from the rest of the house. Sounds of crying, a fractious, unhappy cry, met me as I approached.

“Miss Nora,” observed Adams, answering my glance of inquiry ; “I believe she is fretful sometimes.” Drawing back after flinging open the door, she closed it behind me, and I found myself shut in before being aware of it. Nora, still seated at the breakfast-table, was roaring lustily, with Hubert, flushed and heated, standing by, his large blue eyes flashing with anger. Mrs. Grover, when I entered, was quietly sipping her tea, apparently taking no notice of the children’s quarrel, and yet I could not fail to remark that there was more colour

on her cheek then than yesterday. Slowly rising at my approach, she turned a brown, unprepossessing face towards me, with dark eyes of unusual size and brilliancy. Their expression was peculiar and variable ; they could melt into softness, harden into stoicism, or sparkle with passion. A cold apathy pervaded them now, which told me sufficiently plainly that my visit could have been dispensed with. In dress and bearing she was superior to her station. If I took upon me the responsibility of the children's education, it was for me to ascertain if her capabilities kept pace with her pretensions. Nora's sobs and cries had already reached a higher pitch. With the cunning of childhood, suspecting that a friend was present, she made this loud appeal for sympathy.

"What is the matter, Nora ? Why do you cry ? Are you naughty ?" I added, fancying that I detected in her voice the

sharpness inseparable from a wounded temper.

"No, no," she sobbed, louder and louder, "Hubert is naughty ; he beat me."

"You beat your little sister, Hubert, and you hope to be a man!" exclaimed I, turning towards the lordly little savage, who stood planted firmly on his feet with his hands clutched fast together, eyeing me with defiance and Nora with displeasure.

"Oh, Hubert, when you are a little older you will feel and understand all the disgrace that lies in such an action. A little girl, so small and fragile that a boy should be ashamed to hurt her, and a good kind brother would be so pleased to help and take care of."

"He hurt me, he did, he did," said Nora, girl-like taking advantage of a safe opportunity to complain, and never noticing the relenting colour that rose to his brow.

"She is a story-teller," he muttered.

"For that nurse would reprove her. Hubert should never soil his hands with a blow."

As he immediately examined his hands, not quite sure about the soiling, I perceived some red marks on the back of one of them.

"What is that?" asked I; "how came those scratches?"

The child looked at them earnestly, and then at me, but remained silent. I learned afterwards that they had been inflicted by Nora. Either he did not remember that at the time, or it was not his way to retaliate by telling tales.

"Nora may come downstairs with me for a little while, nurse, if you will permit her, and when she returns will, I hope, have forgotten her little sorrow," said I.

Mrs. Grover was evidently cross, but said nothing, as I took off the little girl's pinafore and wiped her eyes, which were rapidly brightened by smiles, confirming my first

idea that wounded dignity, rather than grief, had caused her tears. Hubert looked on unmoved until the door nearly closed upon us, when on glancing back I saw him cast a half-regretful look towards us. Totally unconscious of infringing the laws of Lorn-dale, I seated the little girl by my side when I took my place at the breakfast-table, after responding, as well as my quick manners would permit, to the slow measured courtesies of the colonel, which, to say the truth, I found fatiguing. He had taken no notice of Nora, who timidly shrank close to me, her little person so nearly concealed by the urn that her father, when he came in soon after us, had sat down before he perceived her.

“Why, Nora, my darling, how came you here?” he asked, in sudden surprise, glancing at his uncle.

Without a word the little girl pointed to me, and rubbed her cheek upon my shoulder. He gave us both a smile that sent a thrill of

pleasure into my heart, saying something about an innovation, and then addressed himself to Colonel Demarcay, leaving the thermometer of my happiness many degrees higher than it was before. Might not this child be the bond of a holier and happier union? The conversation between the two was on business matters, except when the colonel's habitual politeness caused him to make occasional digressions on my account. The breakfast over, one door hardly closed upon Victor when another opened sharply, and Hubert, with an assumption of boldness that sat awkwardly upon him, darted into the middle of the room.

“How now, sir; what brought you here?” asked Colonel Demarcay, sternly. “If it is my pleasure to submit to Mrs. Demarcay's wishes,” and here he bowed to me pointedly, where I sat with Nora by my side, “I do not extend the same indulgence to those who are uninvited.” That one keen glance having

at once discovered what he wanted to know, "Begone, sirrah," he continued; "go back to the nursery, and try and understand the difference between *wanted* and *not wanted*."

Poor Hubert! Reproved, and so summarily dismissed, he stood for a minute, trying to maintain an undaunted countenance. He was not accustomed to disobey his uncle: that was obvious, though pride now struggled in him against defeat.

"Go!" repeated the colonel, harshly, in a loud, authoritative voice.

The child turned and made a few shambling steps towards the door, and then paused. The colonel never removed his eye from him, and I watched the proceedings of the little rebel with profound interest. The total silence was not without its effect, aided, too, as perhaps it was, by the consciousness that we were all looking at him. Again he made a few steps, succeeded by a sullen pause. I think he was trying by

procrastination to render his retreat as little inglorious as he could. Colonel Demarcay rose, and taking up his riding-whip, which lay on a table near, strode towards the culprit. Hubert saw what was coming, and turned himself round to face his uncle, his lips trembling, his eyes lightening with anger, and his eager hands ready to clutch at the whip as it descended.

"Will you go when I bid you?" roared the colonel.

The bold head raised itself up, and he was about to put the finish to his disobedience by saying "No," when the colonel, wroth that any one should withstand him, and perhaps willing to show me that the children were not to be intruded into his presence without permission, lifted the cane. I rushed forward to interpose.

"Stop, sir," I cried, earnestly; "it may be in a measure my fault. Not knowing that I offended against the regulations of



Lorndale, or against your feelings, I invited Nora to accompany me downstairs. Hubert, not seeing any reason for excluding him, may have come in all innocence. Spare him this time."

"It is not for coming, but for his disobedience in not going when I speak, that I chastise," said the colonel, lowering the whip, but suffering it to descend so smartly that it would have cut rather sharply across one of the boy's shoulders, had not my hand been there to receive the blow. Colonel Demarcay must have seen what he had done, though it was too revolting to his pride to notice it. He told Hubert again to leave the room, and this time the child made a dart at the door, slamming it after him with a noise that very much discomforted the nerves of his uncle. Drawing his perfumed handkerchief from his pocket, he passed it over his face; then clearing his voice, said, as calmly as if he had not been

ruffled, and with a polite inclination of the head towards me, "May I ask Mrs. Demarcay to impress upon Hubert the extreme rudeness and impropriety of his conduct? I never knew him disobedient downstairs before; this must be stopped. I look to you for the better regulation of my family in every way, and am sure that I shall not look in vain. If necessary, he must be punished."

The commission given me was anything but pleasant. Shifting on to my shoulders the disagreeable task of fault-finding before I was installed in my new position, was inevitably making it more difficult, nor was I reconciled to the office by the smile and complimentary words in which it had been assigned. To reprove injudiciously would do no good, and how to touch Hubert's feelings I knew not. Words of endearment he would not have from me. He said truly that I did not know him; on his side was

a predisposition against me, and plainly he understood nothing of the vicarious affection I might have for him for his father's sake. On reaching the nursery I found him alone, leaning against the bars of the window. Such an opportunity was not to be lost ; so, leaving Nora, I went to him, and laying my hand upon his shoulder, said, softly, "I have a message for Hubert."

He shook himself free with the same impatient movement as I had given to his father. I could only hope it was from temper, and that that little frame did not and never would know the deep sadness that rests upon a wounded spirit. Unlike Victor, I was not repulsed—we seldom are when we are resolved and in earnest.

"Hear your message, Hubert," I said, softly. "Your uncle"—the flushed face and kindling eye made me change my phraseology. "You are aware that no gentleman bangs a door—he shuts it," I continued,

falling back upon a lower principle because doubtful if his training would permit him to understand a higher, and forgetting, until the words were said, that I was inadvertently condemning my own dear uncle. With the recollection came the picture of the dear, kind man—the happy home I had left—its peace and rest ; aye, far more, the true, genuine affection that reigned within those homely walls. Was I not like our first parents, thrust from my innocent Eden by ignorance and ambition ? The hot tears filled my eyes, for, rightly or wrongly, I was experiencing the fretting sorrow of heart solitude in my bridal home. This, however, was not the time or place to indulge them, so, forcing them back, I tried to occupy myself with Nora, and asked her if she could read. She said “ Yes ; cat, dog, and a great many words,” and immediately fetching a book of monosyllables and pictures, began to show off her acquirements. So

long as the word and the illustration went together it was all very well, but when I pointed to the same word in another part of the book it was entirely guess-work, and more often wrong than right.

"She can't read," said Hubert, disdainfully, who had left the window and was sheepishly leaning against my chair, "and she generally cries when nurse tries to teach her."

"And what can Hubert do?" said I.

Without answering, the boy brought a small lesson-book, soiled, dog-eared, and generally maltreated, and, placing himself at my side, began to read, in a loud, sing-song voice, some sentences from Mrs. Barbauld—how the dog barked, the cat mewed, and the frog croaked. Whilst he was so employed Nurse Grover entered. By the look she cast at Hubert I understood whence originated the child's apparent spontaneous dislike to me, and also her extreme dis-

pleasure at what she thought indicated a defection on the part of her favourite. She need not have been afraid, Hubert's affection was not easily gained by a stranger, nor shaken where it had once been placed.

"Nora has been trying to read, and she made such a mess of it," explained the boy.

"And Master Hubert wishes to show me if, in proportion to his age, he reads better than his sister," added I.

"Master Hubert can read very nicely," replied Grover, encouraging the conceit I was gently endeavouring to check.

"Oh, yes; I can read," said the little fellow, boldly, and turning back to a page with which he was familiar, he read it off with a look of triumph. It required no great penetration to discover that the moral training of these little ones was left to chance, if not frequently receiving a bias in the wrong direction by fostering the passions and weaknesses most convenient to the

humour or fancies of their nurse. Not wishing to hurt her feelings by too early an interference, I thought it better to leave Hubert entirely on her hands, and proposed taking Nora half an hour every day after breakfast.

"She will not be the worse for two lessons a day; my teaching need not supersede yours, it will be an addition only," I said, desiring to gain Mrs. Grover's cheerful consent to the arrangement.

"I don't know, I am sure, ma'am, what is going to happen now," she answered, pressing her lips together and casting her eyes up to the ceiling as if submitting to some great injury. "I have been accustomed to the care of the children ever since Miss Nora was born. Both Mr. and Mrs. Demarcay thought I was to be trusted with them, and that I was competent to manage them without any assistance from other people. Mrs. Demarcay was very particular, no lady could be more so, yet I pleased her. I don't

wish to be offensive, or to speak in any way improperly, but I think the nurse who brought them up, and loves them like a mother, must do better for them than a stranger, who can never be other than a step-parent after all. This is not your fault, ma'am—I don't mean to say that it is; but you know it is not in nature that you should be expected to love strange children—step-mothers never do, whatever they may pretend."

This was throwing down the gauntlet boldly, a mixture of truth and hardihood, for which I was not prepared; yet it was said with such an innocent air that the full impertinence of her speech did not at first strike me. I saw the awkwardness of my position hourly increasing. Without winning the affection of these little ones I was powerless for their good, and we were really beginning our acquaintance with aversion openly taught. Drop by drop she was dis-



tilling the poison of distrust into their youthful minds. Did she know how deeply she was embittering feelings already sufficiently fretted, and thrusting down into the dark depths of disappointment the bright hopes which, if ever cloudless in this life, should meet the bride on her own threshold? How was I to encounter this trial of power and skill between us? We could not both triumph; one must give way. Should I appeal to my husband? He had such absolute confidence in her. Would it be of any use? Yet I had promised him to love and guide his little ones with all the judgment I possessed, and was now at war with my own convictions, being quite unable to carry them out. In all conscientiousness, I felt that Mrs. Grover was not the person to be entrusted with the important office she held, but how and when could I venture to dismiss her? Old servants are often a great trial to a young mistress; when good, they are

generally too opinionated to adapt themselves to any change, not knowing that difference of individuality necessarily obliges certain variations, which should not be regarded as innovations. When bad or undisciplined, there is no calculating the extremes to which ignorance and temper may lead them. Judging it the most prudent course, I went away without urging Nora's visit to me, but resolved that for one part of the day both Hubert and his sister should be under my control, if possible.

## CHAPTER VII.

HITHERTO the children had dined in the nursery. As the most natural thing, I proposed having them to dine with me at my luncheon-hour. Adams, to whom I mentioned my project on leaving the nursery, and who also seemed ready to give me any information required respecting the habits of the household, looked greatly surprised.

"It is the usual arrangement when children are young," I observed, perceiving her hesitation.

"Yes, ma'am, it is, in some families. It is, as you say, usual, but Miss Nora is very young, and Master Hubert is troublesome sometimes, and the colonel is not accustomed

to have them except when he sends for them, and does not like being put out of his way; and—and Mr. Demarcay likes them to be with the nurse.”

My difficulties were taking more formidable dimensions. All three would be against me; yet I determined to persevere. So much was at stake, both for the children and for me; if, to spare myself conflict and trouble, I did nothing for their training now, I could only expect to reap a harvest of briers and thorns in their indifference and the censure of my own conscience. Resolving to begin to-day, I was leaving my room to seek an interview with my husband when Adams stopped me.

“What is the matter with your hand? It is swollen.”

There was a large welt across the back, of which I made light, bathed it for a few minutes in water without gratifying her curiosity, and then, carelessly covering it

with my handkerchief, went downstairs and tapped at Victor's door. He was just going out, but invited me to enter. Laying down his hat he gave me a chair and asked what he could do for me, taking, as it seemed to me, especial care to avoid the impoliteness of appearing to be in a hurry. I had come to make a proposition for the benefit of his children, and actually felt half afraid of entering upon the subject. The situation was too ridiculous to last. It seemed best to make a plunge at once.

"You are anxious about the welfare of your children," I began.

By the cold smile that answered me, so different from his usual manner where the little ones were concerned, I knew that Mrs. Grover's adverse influence had been already at work ; yet, in spite of that, the subject must be pursued. The children's well-being, as well as my happiness and the peace of the household, were at stake. It would be a

plain dereliction of duty to make no effort to draw them sometimes from the nursery, where their improvement was more than doubtful.

"You remember how earnestly you recommended Hubert and Nora to my love and care?" I continued, having a strong impression that I must postpone giving my opinion of the nurse until I had established his confidence in me.

"Yes; I hoped very much from your good sense and temper, and do not think I shall be disappointed," he added, with kindness.

"Not if I can help it; but if any good is to be done I must have opportunities, and those you must make for me. Mrs. Grover may be a little too jealous at first to understand that I seek to benefit her charges; prejudice in her sphere of life is usually as strong as it is unreasoning." Then, by way of anticipating the effect of her strongest

weapon of attack, I said, "Step-mothers, you know, are liable to suspicion, and also to have their actions misinterpreted." Victor looked troubled, but asked what I wished him to do.

"I wish to have Hubert and Nora down to dine whilst I lunch."

"Nothing could be more agreeable to me in every way," was the prompt response. "I will not conceal from you that there are difficulties. My uncle does not like to be put out of his ways. Such an arrangement might not be agreeable to him."

"If I secure Colonel Demarcay's consent, you will give the necessary orders to Grover? that is what I want from you. I am going to him now; where shall I find you to communicate the result?"

"I had better prepare Grover to send the children down if you ask for them. Having some distance to ride this morning, I may not be back before luncheon."

The proposition was not altogether agreeable. Success with Colonel Demarcay was uncertain, and the consequent triumph of Grover equally sure if I failed. Some few minutes afterwards, on passing Victor's room, not having succeeded in finding the colonel, I met the nurse coming out, and encountered a look of such singular cunning and self-satisfaction that I could not help thinking she had gratified, in some way or other, her malevolent feelings towards me. When, about half an hour later, I knocked at Colonel Demarcay's door, I was received with elaborate expressions of gratification.

"You have anticipated me, my dear madam. I meant to-day to signify to you how much pleasure I expected in your company, and ask you to pay me a visit in my dull bachelor quarters."

As he spoke he glanced with no humble eye around the sumptuous room, where every comfort that wealth or ingenuity



could devise had been procured. No foot-fall could be heard on the thick-piled carpet, no noise distract the attention, and no draught penetrate through the rich curtains or closely-fitting windows. In an easy-chair at a table, with letters and papers scattered before him, the colonel was sitting when I entered. He rose immediately, and did not resume his seat until, having well-rounded off his periods of welcome, he left me free to explain the reason of my intrusion.

“And may I not hope that there is some desire to please me also, and that you are willing to give a portion of your time to one whose weakening sight does not permit him to read as formerly, nor to be as independent as he could wish?”

Without knowing how much was implied by it, I expressed a readiness to make myself useful whenever required.

“Very useful you may be to me. I want

a secretary such as you," he added, with the courtly smile ever at his command. "You can give me great help in collecting and arranging my notes from different authors, which from long habits of neglect have accumulated."

We were wandering far from the object I had in view, especially as the colonel, rising, showed me an *escritoire* with several drawers, all of which appeared full of papers. "Do you understand German?" he asked, abruptly.

"A little," I was obliged to answer, though half frightened at the admission.

"Some of these papers are copies of the original text," he observed; "but the greater part are quotations from English translations of German authors. I am glad you know something of German."

"Very little," I repeated, not without dismay, as the prospect of being set to decipher papers on subjects in which I took

no interest rose before me. Was I to be Colonel Demarcay's companion, and were the sweet ties of wife and mother to be renounced for weary hours spent in an atmosphere and in a society for which I had no inclination? A sharp pang of resentment shot through my heart against Victor. Why had he not better explained the life for which I was destined? To be his partner—to win him to smiles of confidence and affection, and to know that I was doing something to build up again the home that had been shattered and desolated—with this I would have tried to be content, though the sweet fragrance of a true love might never have been mine. But this! In the vexation induced by these reflections I abruptly left the colonel's side, and, walking to the window, relieved my mind by drumming against the glass. The impatient movement jarred the colonel's nerves, but not till he spoke did I perceive how much I was irritating his fine sensibilities.

"How old are you, Mrs. Demarcay? Pardon me if the question be indiscreet, mais je crois que cela peut se dire entre nous."

"I am nearly twenty-two." Here I left off the tapping that so annoyed him, and resumed my seat.

"I wish you could have added another decade," he answered.

Ten years more! By that time some changes must have happened; would they be for the better or the worse? I questioned with myself, and a sad presentiment that the years to come would be tinted with darker colours than the present expressed itself involuntarily in a sigh.

"Did you speak?" asked the colonel.

"I did not, but I am going to do so."

The smile I called up was but the melancholy ghost of one, yet Colonel Demarcay did the same, and expressed himself all attention. Partly from shyness, and partly

from the colour of my thoughts, the commencement, to say the least, was ungracious, and not likely to please my fastidious auditor. "Now I am here—" (he bowed graciously)—I referred to my entrance into the family, not into his room—"now I am here, there are certain duties which seem to me paramount."

"And they are?" observed the colonel.

"They are connected with the children."

"So large a preface for so small a purpose."

A shade of sarcasm in his voice piqued me into greater earnestness. In a few seconds I poured out my ideas upon the injustice done to step-mothers in general, spoke warmly in their defence, and ended by saying that I meant to give Hubert and Nora the care, consideration, and tenderness of a real mother, concluding with, "They shall not miss her if I can help it."

"That is more than probable; at all

events, it is prettily said," was the grave reply, whilst his cold eye, pitiless of my rising colour and embarrassment, examined me with critical acumen. "And what plan have you for their improvement? Of course you have one ready."

The one I then had in view seemed trifling indeed, after the unfortunate way in which I had set about announcing it, but I mentioned it nevertheless. "I wish them to dine with me at my luncheon. Some break must be made in their habits. I ought not to leave them entirely in the nursery. I ought——"

"To do your duty as a step-mother. I understand, you think it best to begin at the lowest round of the ladder."

"To be perfectly open with you, I foresee that obstacles will be thrown in the way of any change I make, or improvement I suggest," answered I, without noticing the latent cynicism of his remark, "yet in the

interest of my husband's children I must make them. I am not satisfied with Grover."

"Nor am I. Her weekly account is often incomprehensible. I shall be much obliged to you to overlook it and correct her inaccuracies. The children are always having boots and pinafores—two dozen of the latter at a time. I approve of comfort, but desire to check waste. You will have the kindness to examine her book before I see it."

This was not what I wanted. To be brought into contact with Mrs. Grover as a reprover was rather premature, and would be fatal to my gaining the hearts of the children. It was her policy to keep them away from me. Nora's offence this morning, for which her brother had struck her uncensured, was partly for having permitted me to pet her the day before, and partly because she would not promise not to do it again.

"Is she a proper person for her position?" I ventured to ask, emboldened by the colonel's recent admission. Slightly raising his shoulders, he answered, "Victor is infatuated with her because she was fond of his wife, or has succeeded in persuading him so. I beg your pardon, I am speaking of the first Mrs. Demarcay. Once, when I ventured to make an observation respecting her expenses, she carried her cause to Victor, lamenting over my want of confidence, and wondering what would become of the children if she left them. She wept and wailed, until he agreed to settle her account himself, and would have done so, had I allowed it. Perhaps you do not know that every expense of this house is borne by me?"

At this point, our interview was interrupted by the announcement of a visitor, one of his large tenants, who, in the absence of my husband, the general arbiter in



matters of business, had requested to see Colonel Demarcay. Not sorry to conclude the interview without a positive negative, when I left Colonel Demarcay I took it upon myself to send Grover the message agreed on between me and Victor, namely, to be prepared for the children to dine downstairs. My messenger, Adams, did not, I fancy, meet with a cordial reception, judging from a few desultory remarks dropped by her upon the ignorance and pretension of certain people. Some misgivings I had about the nurse's obedience and my power to exact submission. However, I was mistaken ; that was not the annoyance reserved for me. A few minutes before the time the children entered, with clean pinafores and their hair neatly arranged, looking half shy and half pleased, the latter expression becoming more distinct as some one closed the door behind them. Hubert looked at me less defiantly than hitherto, and when, luncheon being an-

nounced, I took Nora by the hand, he ran on before us with a rude energy it was necessary to check. I seated myself with one of them on either side ; the servant had just removed the covers when my husband, opening the door, stopped short with palpable surprise. " Papa, papa," they cried out, joyously. " Do come and sit by me," said Nora. Hubert, leaving his chair, ran to seize his father by the hand, and Nora would have done the same had I not prevented her. Though able to make her sit still, I could not quiet the clamour from their little throats, and was truly thankful that Colonel Demarcay was not there to witness my woeful inability to enforce obedience. At first Victor seemed to enjoy the juvenile merriment ; it was only when I covered my ears, to exclude the din and screams of shrill voices, that he interfered.

" Enough, enough ! children," he said ;  
" if you are brought here by a kind friend,

you must not hurt or vex her with your boisterous ways."

It did not escape my notice how ingeniously he avoided giving me the title of my new relationship. My thoughts on the subject were suddenly interrupted by a question from him, and Nora's answer.

"Ella, what have you done to your hand?"

"Uncle struck her with the whip," said the little girl, quickly; and finding that her father listened, she became more communicative. "He meant to beat Hubert, only she put her hand on his shoulder."

"It is nothing—nothing at all; it scarcely hurts me," I replied, drawing my hand away, yet not so quickly but that, to my vexation, Colonel Demarcay, who then entered, must have seen that it had been undergoing examination.

"She was screening Hubert from the effects of disobedience, when she accidentally

suffered. I offer Mrs. Demarcay my sincerest regrets, and hope that henceforth she will allow every culprit to answer for himself. I am ready for luncheon, Patrick."

The stern part of the sentence was addressed to Victor for my benefit, the latter to the servant in attendance. Among his other ailments, the colonel was, I discovered, dyspeptic, and always had one or two dishes prepared for him. Whilst he now sat waiting their arrival, a general silence fell upon us all. The children were quiet, casting shy glances at their uncle; Victor's pleasant smiles, and consequently my satisfaction in what I had undertaken, were gone. At this juncture the door opened with a startling suddenness, and Grover, her dark eyes flashing with fiery brightness, her tall figure looking larger and grander than usual, confronted me.

"What orders has Mrs. Demarcay given about my dinner?"

Orders! I was puzzled how to answer her. I had given none, nor had I thought any necessary.

“Because you did not, I suppose, think I was going to dine with the servants? I, who have had the charge of the children so many years, and whom their poor dear mother liked and trusted. Ah! it was a sad day for them, and for us all, when she was taken, poor lamb. She would often dine with us when the gentlemen were out, and had none of these new ways. My poor dear mistress!”

Ostentatiously wiping her eyes, she turned them upon my husband with a soft, mournful expression. I looked at him too. He was occupied in smoothing the salt in the salt-cellar, and did not raise his head. Finding that he would not speak, I glanced at Colonel Demarcay with no better success. Neither seemed to have an idea that I wanted support or assistance; I was therefore obliged to

step at once into my place as mistress. "You can have your dinner in the nursery as usual, and the maid who served you before can continue to do so." Having said this, I went on eating, and Grover, finding that no one else spoke, left the room. If I congratulated myself on having cleverly met a difficulty, my triumph was not of long duration. The luncheon was scarcely finished when the servant informed me that some one wished to speak to me. Imagining it might be some household disquietude respecting Grover, I left the room, unwilling to have auditors since they would not be helpers. A smart-looking young girl met me in the passage, and very decidedly informed me that she was as good as Grover, and "objected to wait upon her," and that she would rather give up her place. And all this had come of my simple innovation on this the first day of my residence in my new home.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE following day being Sunday, after breakfast I asked Victor if the children would go to church with us. There was a slight hesitation, and then he answered that it should be as I wished. With this concession I went to make the proposition to Grover, and found her, as might be expected, sharp and disagreeable. She thought herself ill-treated the day before, and visited her annoyance upon me, although I had dismissed the young girl who refused to serve her, and requested the housekeeper to send up her dinner comfortably. "Is Colonel Demarcay ill?" I inquired of my husband,

when the children joined us, dressed for walking.

“Not that I know of: he is as usual. Why do you ask?”

“Because he has no intention of accompanying us”—for the colonel, after offering me the carriage, had retired to his study with a book in his hand, fetched from the general library, and closed the door.

“Do you regard non-attendance at church as a sign of illness?”

“The only excuse for it,” I replied, at which Victor cleared his voice and called to the children to remain near us.

Unintentionally, and unwillingly on my part, we made quite a sensation when we entered the little church of Halstead. There was a general commotion; the occupants stood up and leant over the high-backed pews as we wended our steps to our own, preceded by Hubert, who boldly led the way, smiling into the faces that were look-



ing down upon him. When seated, I found myself alone at one end of a large carpeted alcove, while Victor, surrounded by the two children, was at the other. He whispered to Hubert, who immediately took his place by me, and behaved tolerably well throughout the service, excepting for signs of weariness evinced during the sermon, which obliged me to reprove him. Nora sat still in her father's arms: I do not say she did not go to sleep; but she gave no trouble. On our return, Colonel Demarcay distressed me by asking how I liked the sermon. I had found it high and dry, and the service rather perfunctorily performed, but having been brought up in a great respect for the clergy, hesitated about giving my opinion, yet ultimately said that I had been accustomed to better preaching.

"There is not very much difference among them," observed the colonel; "a little more or less grace in diction, or more ease in

composition, that is all. I never met one who did not walk in the same fetters as his brother. Mr. Kingston is a respectable man in his way, but narrow—narrow—narrow to imbecility ! ”

Not knowing anything of the gentleman, I could not contest the point, though I wished to do so, Colonel Demarcay's supercilious way of depreciating him having inclined me in his favour. I ventured, however, to remark that as all clergymen dealt with the same subjects, there ought not to be much diversity of views.

“Precisely; I believe you have touched the very spring and secret of the matter.”

If the colonel had not bowed with an air indicating that the subject was disposed of, I should not have known what to say; something in the tone of his voice grated on my ear. A meaning underlay his words that I could not seize, and yet it made me doubtful and uncomfortable. Not from a

person so opposite in the whole man, both outer and inner, did I expect to find the homely, simple piety of my uncle, but Colonel Demarcay's expressions had a flavour about them that I neither liked nor understood.

"He may be a good man, though not a brilliant one," I observed, my courage gathering strength from reflection.

"He may ; many a good man lives in a fog which he is not able to see through. We will not dispute about Mr. Kingston, we have something more pleasant to do. I see that luncheon is ready. My dear madam——" He presented his arm, and without waiting for the children, we went into the dining-room.

"In the course of the afternoon I shall have the honour of taking you down to the shore," bowed the colonel : "we have a part, a very small part, of the property washed by the sea. I have had a path made from

the cliff; the gate is kept locked by my orders to prevent the intrusion of strangers and vagabonds. It is more lonely than distant, which makes me willing to accompany you."

Evidently Colonel Demarcay never thought of my attending the afternoon service, a habit in which I had been reared too systematically to resign without a struggle. Finding by a glance at Victor that he understood my hesitation 'as little as his uncle, I was obliged to explain myself, and asked him to have the kindness to escort me another day. The coldness of the bow with which my request was received inclined me to regard it more as a token of displeasure than a promise of future compliance.

"Why won't you go now?" said Hubert, who had vociferously claimed permission to join us.

"I am going to church," I blurted out, "and it will be too late afterwards."

"But you have been," said the child, opening wide his wondering eyes; "why must you go again? Papa, papa, never mind her; oh, do take me, do take me and Nora too."

He seized his father's hand as if to drag him there at once, and only desisted on receiving an intimation that he might ask him again in half an hour. At the end of that time I saw them start—Victor and the two children, and Nurse Grover also; Hubert, lithe of heart and limb, running hither and thither, and the others walking and talking. The colonel, offended probably at having his courteous attention declined, retired to his study and his books; a stroll with the children was not in his way; their restlessness and chatter, with no better restraint than their father or nurse, was, as he afterwards told me, too much for his nerves. I was not, however, forgiven when we met at dinner. He was too well-bred to talk at me, but there was a latent sar-

casm in all he said, and a hard dry way of treating every subject he handled that made me, and the house too, cold and dreary.

When the day was over and night came I retired to my room, but not to my usual rest. To call it a Sabbath day was a misnomer. Anxieties, little worries, clouds no bigger perhaps than a man's hand, had gathered about me, the easy service I had formerly mistaken for principle being now troubled and faulty. I was not the happier for having been to church. Weakness and insufficiency were oppressing me. Rashly, most rashly, I had undertaken things too hard for me. Captivated by a pleasing exterior, by words upon which I put my own meaning, descriptions of duties that seemed all pleasure, I had entered a family of which I really knew nothing. The atmosphere around me was so cold, my husband usually silent, and Colonel Demarcay—I would rather hear no conversation

at all than talk to him. A bride not a week old, had I dared, willingly would I have gone back to dear, simple Rosewood, and accepted with thankfulness its monotonous life and limited associations.

The next morning I was invited into the colonel's study. The housekeeper was there, and to her I was formally presented as the real mistress of Lorndale: "Capable of giving intelligent, and not impossible, orders, like the poor child who was here before."

Mrs. Dixon curtseyed, examining me all the while with a scrutinizing, imperturbable gravity, which relaxed a little when I said, "Mrs. Dixon will, I hope, first instruct me as to your tastes, and the habits of the household. I do not wish to make changes ignorantly."

"I wish Grover to send her book to Mrs. Demarcay for the future; she will better understand those mysteries of boots, shoes, and pinafores, that have so often

perplexed me. Tell her to do so," said the colonel.

"Certainly, sir."

Mrs. Dixon's smile seemed to express some enjoyment of the commission given her, and made me fear the task now devolving upon me. In a day or two a large parcel was sent to my private sitting-room, with Colonel Demarcay's compliments. It contained the whole furniture of a writing-table, in pale blue leather, with golden-looking clasps and borders, inlaid with onyx and jasper, a case with account-books of the same character, and every other appendage that luxury could invent. This was scarcely admired and arranged on the table, when a servant brought me a small sealed packet—"from the colonel."

With very little of the interest or curiosity natural to youth, I opened it, and found a silver casket of exquisite though ancient workmanship, locked, but with the key



attached to the handle, the wards of which seemed extremely complicated. Twice I turned it round, and then the lid flew open with a sharp click, displaying to my wondering sight two compartments filled with gold, and a small morocco rouleau occupying the rest of the space. This held bank-notes, which I did not stop to count, but quickly hid from sight by closing the box. What was all this wealth to me? and what was I to do with it? With a sudden return of my natural vivacity, I rushed to the colonel's study, intending to remonstrate about his splendid gift, and entreat him to resume a part of it; but it was empty, and his own man, who followed me into the room, informed me that his master was out riding.

“When will he return?”

Patrick did not know, but thought he would not be long—an hour or so, no more. Seating myself with the casket before me, I

hoped that he would leave me to wait his master's return, which, however, he did not seem disposed to do. Instead of that, he displaced the papers and ornaments lying about, and then put them back again, and finally touched everything once more with his pocket-handkerchief, using it as a duster.

"Perhaps Colonel Demarcay may not like to find me here?" I said at length, perceiving that I was not to be left alone.

"Perhaps not; I can't say. The other Mrs. Demarcay never came here."

The other Mrs. Demarcay! How I longed to hear and know something of my predecessor! Victor had spoken of her as beautiful, Mrs. Grover with unqualified praise, and the colonel as a child giving impossible orders. A very lovely face caught my eye in a picture hanging on the wall, opposite to the chair in which Colonel Demarcay usually sat. Seeing my attention attracted, Patrick went immediately and

drew down the blind half-way, so as to place it in a good light. It was that of a nun, clad in brown serge, endeavouring to halt at the top of a flight of steps leading to some dark spot, down which a monk on either side was dragging her, followed by a number of monks, each holding a lighted taper in one hand and a missal in the other, advancing with slow, measured gait, and singing apparently some funeral dirge. The distress and horror vividly painted on that young face, the distended eyes cast upwards in mute appeal to heaven for a help that did not come, the anguish, the mortal agony depicted, that racked the soul to contemplate, and the ferocious expression of her two leaders as they glanced down at her and at each other, made one's heart ache.

A mean-looking, contemptible object at the end of the procession, carrying a basket from which peeped some workman's tools, left no doubt that one of those scenes of

bitter irony—*vade in pace*—was about to be enacted. It was so real, so lifelike, that I held my breath as I looked at it, and uttered an audible expression of relief when Patrick, by pulling down the blind, entirely changed the light. Like every one who reads, I knew that such deeds were done in the dark ages, and had felt a passing pang in reading of them. The sight of this picture, however, oppressed me strangely, making me wonder how the colonel could bear to have it continually before him; it was so real, so lifelike, surely it was a portrait. Who could the lady be?

“What is this? Is it a fancy picture?” I asked, with painful interest.

The old man shook his head.

“An over true one, ma’am, though it is hard to believe such things. I still believe in devils,” he added, looking cautiously round him as he spoke. “My master has the original in his castle in Normandy,

which he often visits. This is only a copy. It is a family story, all true ; it happened about a hundred years ago."

" Was the lady a Demarcay ? "

" She was, and she wasn't. She was married to one of the family, but never claimed. Poor lady ! her history has done a power of harm. I always say that we can't take one wrong step but it leads to another. Evil is something like the veins in our body ; it runs everywhere—into all corners and unlikely places. Who would think, now, that I, Patrick More, am the worse for the pains and sufferings of that sweet unknown beauty whom I never saw, and should never have heard of but for the fate that made me servant to the colonel ? "

" Have you lived long with him ? " I asked.

" Very long, almost too long," returned the old man with a sigh, " yet I cannot

leave him. I saved his life on the battle-field by carrying him off when wounded, in spite of himself ; two minutes after we left the spot where he had fallen from his horse, a ball ploughed up the ground. It was a near thing. It might have been better for us if we had stayed—at least for me. No ; no one would have old Patrick now, and I have no one to take care of me. I eat the colonel's bread ; I must serve him to the end. He should know best, for sure he is a clever man ; anyhow, it is difficult to answer such hard questions as that."

Patrick gave a sorrowful look at the picture, which induced me to ask how that story, more than a hundred years old, could affect his life.

"That appears wonderful to you, and well it may ; you think it a great mystery, and yet I could clear it all up in a few minutes if I chose. Maybe that all other mysteries could be explained too ; but we must find

the key, and Patrick is very ignorant. It would have been well if he had found that out before. Shall I let you know when Colonel Demarcay returns ? ”

This abrupt transition of subject, in addition to the equally marked change in the demeanour of the old man, who, ceasing his garrulity, became the respectful servant once more, obliged me to restrain my curiosity. Interpreting his question into a hint that I had better not be found in the study on Colonel Demarcay's return, I took up my casket, saying I would find some other opportunity of speaking to his master, and hurried away with additional materials for thought and reflection. Patrick I had noticed from his quiet, serious face when he waited on the colonel at luncheon, the only time in which he appeared in the dining-room. I had met him also on my return from afternoon church ; he was walking under the trees of the park at a short dis-

tance from my path, with a slow, hesitating gait, and seemed restless and unhappy. Some heavy thought evidently oppressed the old man, though I could not think it had any connection with the picture. He was half Irish and half Scotch, I afterwards ascertained, and probably had the mixed character of the two nations. Inheriting an imaginative, poetic character from his mother, he had possibly woven a few threads of romance out of the nun's history into his own, and was trying to make them agree. Though differing in many respects, both Scotch and Irish peasants are often deeply superstitious. In this simple way I explained it all to my own satisfaction. It was not very long before Patrick, in the fulness of his heart, made other confidences, and unconsciously increased my dissatisfaction with my life at Lorndale, by alienating me further from the one best-disposed towards me.



## CHAPTER IX.

THE postman's bag was my principal interest, and this morning brought me the pleasure of a letter from Agnes, with the promise of one shortly from Aunt Edith. Whilst reading it my attention was diverted by Victor's remarks to his uncle. "Bertha and her mother are anxious to pay us a visit. They have heard of a house not far from this neighbourhood, and would like to rent it if it turns out to be a suitable residence for them. They cannot be here till the first week in September."

"That is time enough," observed the colonel, shortly; and then meeting my inquiring eyes, he added, "Mrs. Rogers is Victor's mother-in-law."

Bertha, then, was his wife's sister and the children's aunt. They were coming when my honeymoon, as the early period of married life is called, had run its course. Very long the days were drawn out, though what with that I created for myself, and that which was made for me, there was no lack of occupation. The two extremes met in the colonel and Nora. Having succeeded in establishing a daily visit from the little girl before breakfast, I made use of the opportunity to instruct and amuse her. It was a pleasure to hear her childish babble, and to open her mind to new impressions. Hubert never came, not even to thank me for the toys which I sent him through his sister. Usually I drove once a day with the colonel, and being compelled to keep his money, soothed my feelings by making purchases for the children—not always very judicious. No remark of the kind, however, came from him ; he insisted upon my spend-

ing, and appeared to make it an especial point to leave me free to choose the ways and means.

A great portion of my morning was passed with him. I read the papers aloud to spare his eyes, and now and then an article from some review. He chose them; all were clever, but chiefly of that biting character which spares no one. Some questions there were on science I did not follow nor even care to understand, though by leading remarks from time to time he invited me to discuss them. They did not interest me. The sorting of the papers was not again proposed, for which I was thankful, being convinced it would be dry, hard labour, the colonel's tastes and mine appearing diametrically opposed. Before long visitors came. Victor was generally absent, attending some board of directors in London instead of his uncle, or engaged about the property. Though Colonel Demarcay made a point of



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Doomed to a companionship contaminating

and uncongenial, how should I escape an influence so withering? how preserve the healthful mind I had till now enjoyed? how strengthen myself for the part I had undertaken? He often used phrases and expressions which distressed me, even when unconscious of their real signification. What if, by repetition, here a word and there a word, doubt and distrust were generated? what if my mind, inexperienced and comparatively ignorant, found some stumbling-block over which it could not pass, and hope and faith, the best things to be found in this life, the only solaces in times of difficulty and trouble, fled away and left me only the bitter husks of sceptical indifference? I remembered and understood now a word spoken by honest Patrick when he saw me looking at something in the library, "Don't read the master's books; I think no good will come of it."

The hope of escaping from constant

attendance upon Colonel Demarcay reconciled me to the coming of Mrs. and Miss Rogers; there might be disagreeables connected with their visit, but not dangers, and the courtesies of society must take up some portion of our time. Victor, too, would naturally be more at home, at least at first, and the colonel, having others to amuse him, would not demand so much of me. By cataloguing my advantages, they seemed to increase. The colonel was personally very kind to me, and deferential to my wishes. For some days before the arrival of our visitors, I had been able to shorten my morning engagement in the study. After reading the papers, I once asked if I could go away, when he deprecated all intention of fatiguing me, and requested me at all times to regard my own health and comfort, assuring me, with unvarying politeness, that by making him the second consideration, I virtually made him the first. Hap-

pily, too, I had found no inaccuracies in Mrs. Grover's accounts, and was able to testify that everything was right; consequently there was no annoyance on that subject.

The colonel's polished tones were never raised to me, but often to Hubert, for even a trivial offence. The worst feature in the boy was the evanescent character of all impressions. Whilst his uncle reproved, he would sometimes blush and look down, but the voice of chiding had no sooner ceased than he was romping with his favourite terrier, Nettle, in the hall, or racing Nora round as his pony. Half an hour's play they usually had before the nurse fetched them, and a day rarely passed in which Hubert did not incur some rebuke. I wished it were otherwise, for the boy's sake, who, between the foolish indulgence of Grover, and the harshness of his uncle, was in a fair way of being spoiled. School

was the only remedy. Not yet had I ventured to hint such a thing, but purposed doing so when his more immediate relatives arrived, supposing that his grandmother and aunt would naturally have his real interest at heart. With me he would not be friendly, and the kisses that little Nora so willingly gave me had the effect of making him cross, and sometimes unkind. "She is not your mamma," he would say, and drag the little girl away to play with him. Occasionally I heard her cry after these little quarrels, but on my peeping into the hall, there were no complaints. A day or two before the arrival of Mrs. Rogers I heard a great shouting—cries and shrill laughter. On opening the door, the first object seen was Hubert, kneeling in front of the large dog—which was a forbidden visitor there—and keeping him in an upright position. Over the dog's shoulders was his uncle's great overcoat, and the boy



was settling on his shaggy head a wig which the colonel wore when he had a cold.

"Will you be quiet, sir? will you be good, or must I use the whip?" Hubert was saying, gravely, as a quick movement on the part of Nero displaced his hairy crown. "But his ears—come, Nora, try to tuck in one, while I put up the other," continued the child. "He won't be uncle with his ears hanging down. There, doesn't he look wise and old—just like uncle?" he was saying, having settled the wig to his mind, and surveying his labour with great satisfaction. I was about to remonstrate, and send the children to the nursery, fearing the effect of the juvenile peccadillo upon the colonel if he chanced to see them, when he suddenly appeared, and stood still, rooted to the ground with displeasure at Hubert's audacity.

"You permit this unexampled impertinence!" he observed, angrily addressing me.

"I was just going to speak," was my answer ; but a smile lurked in the corners of my mouth. I could not take a serious view of this childish folly, and murmured something about youthful spirits.

"I find you strangely indulgent—another step in the ladder," said the colonel ; "perhaps you would be less so if turned into ridicule yourself."

"Even then I hope to be able to distinguish between a failure in principle and a breach of propriety," I answered, promptly, almost depising the old man for a vanity or consciousness so susceptible.

"Ladies are always in the right," he said, bending low, yet not without my reading his extreme annoyance in his heightened colour.

Turning to Hubert, he asked, imperatively, "How did you get that ?" pointing to the luckless wig.

The child not replying, I took advantage

of the pause to order him to restore it to its place, and go back to the nursery. He waited no second bidding, but, snatching the offending article from the dog's head, hurried along the hall. To my dismay, before he was out of sight he clapped it upon his own head, and, to make the sight more ludicrous, hind part before. Most likely it was an accident, but the colonel was enraged. I saw him stalk after the delinquent, and heard afterwards that he had locked him up in his dressing-room, upstairs.

Poor boy ! that was not the way to train his character. My heart yearned over him. Except for an occasional scuffle with Nora, and persistent rudeness to me, there was no harm in him. I never found him out in an untruth, and never perceived that he shrunk from owning to a fault or an accident. He could not forgive me for being Nora's new mamma, and would not accept a kindness at my hands, nor be friendly with

Nora when she permitted me to caress her. The kind feeling I longed to testify was, perforce, repressed; nor might I use any one of the tender expletives usually addressed to children. Nay, I was obliged to keep guard over my tongue, lest his refractory nature should be outraged by any affectionate epithet. My goodwill, therefore, could only be shown in a way that childhood least understands.

Walking about the lawn that afternoon, I was considering how best to urge on Victor the necessity of sending Hubert to school in order to avoid greater evils at home, when a slight noise made me look upwards. Hubert had raised the sash of the window of the room where he was imprisoned, and was already half-way out. His object was evident; he meant to drop on a projection below, and find his way to the window of another room, from which he might make his escape. From where I stood, the ledge

appeared so narrow, that a fall was inevitable. To be startled by a word or movement of any sort would precipitate him downwards nearly twenty feet. Nothing could be done but to gaze in silent horror, hoping that the window of the other room was not closed. Motionless, and even holding my breath lest that should disturb the deep silence necessary for his success, I stood and watched, with clasped hands and straining eyes, as, with his fingers pressed against the wall, his little feet shuffled along, slowly, carefully. Thinking that the daring adventurer might really accomplish his purpose, I began to breathe more freely, when a voice a few paces off addressed me, "What is the matter, Ella?" Instantly raising my trembling arm, I tried to check my husband, who was approaching, ignorant of what was passing. It was too late. Disturbed by the sound, Hubert lifted his eyes, lost his balance, and fell with a heavy thud to the ground, just at his father's

feet, who, understanding the danger at a glance, had rushed forward to save him. In speechless grief Victor snatched him up and bore him into the nursery.

I confess to feeling a strong amount of angry surprise when Grover, thrusting me aside to administer restoratives herself, lamented over the evils which were sure to follow new notions and habits, ending with the remark that if no one had interfered, and the children had been allowed to go on as usual, this accident would not have happened. That was not the moment to animadvert upon Hubert's faults and disobedience, so I was silent.

The fall did not prove a serious one. Stunned at first, and somewhat bruised, for two days Hubert was kept in bed ; but by the time his grandmother and aunt arrived, the dauntless child was running about, racing Nero and romping with Nettle, as full of energy as ever. It required misad-

ventures more serious than this to tame him. My little lecture had been given faithfully as regarded my own conscience, and without exciting any apparent resentment in the child. He listened with downcast eyes while, insisting upon the duty of obedience, I endeavoured to point out the many sorrows that often spring from a neglect of it. No feeling, however, was elicited beyond a heightened colour, which might mean displeasure at being rebuked; his clear blue eye was expressionless, and when I had finished, he tossed back his long golden curls, and having asked if he might go out with his nurse, walked away as unconcerned as if I had not spoken. Knowing that any reprimand from me would secure him an excess of indulgence upstairs, it was already something that he had abstained from giving any perceptible sign of impatience. I do not know if he listened, I only know that sorrow came to him, as

it does to all self-willed, ardent temperaments, and that the little heart nearly broke with its own grief before he could distinguish true kindness from false.



## CHAPTER X.

EXCITEMENT of an unusual degree prevailed at Lorndale the morning Mrs. and Miss Rogers were expected. Nora could talk of nothing else; vain were all my efforts to insinuate a word of instruction during her early visit to me, or to get her to read a sentence with attention. Aunt Bertha, in one way or other, was always coming upon the scene, and seemed to have a large share of her childish heart.

"She appears very fond of her aunt," I observed to Adams, when, despairing of the little one deriving any benefit, I dismissed her to the nursery.

"Grover has been talking to her, that is all. I don't think Miss Nora remembers

her aunt; she has not seen her for three years; she is too young to go back so far."

"Is Miss Rogers like her sister?" I ventured to ask, the desire of knowing something of my predecessor being strong upon me.

"Oh, no; Hubert is like his mamma; Miss Rogers is dark."

"Like Miss Nora?"

"Dark, but not like her except that she is short; both sisters were very small."

"You knew Mrs. Demarcay, then?"

"A little. I lived once with Miss Everett. Mrs. Demarcay called sometimes with Miss Rogers. The sisters were fond of each other, I will say that."

"Is there any likeness of Mrs. Demarcay in the house?"

"Yes, a small portrait; but I have not seen it. Mr. Demarcay keeps one in his dressing-case; another, I am told, he wears in a locket round his neck."

Repressing the spasmodic pain that all at once seemed to contract my heart, I observed, with as much calmness as I could command, "Miss Everett has not called upon me."

"She is in deep mourning for her mother, a dear, good lady, who died a few months ago. I think she has no heart for visiting."

This lady was the only person in our small parish church whom I could regard as in a sphere of life likely to visit the Demarcays. Her face, at once sweet and intellectual, interested me as I saw her in a farther corner of the church, with her long veil thrown back, and her eyes usually fastened on her book. Once they met mine, and attracted me by their look of meek resignation. I had seen her, too, going in and out among the cottages when driving with the colonel, who on one occasion said, in a disparaging tone, "Miss Everett would not be a nice companion for you ; she is too dull

and heavy in hand, whereas cheerfulness and sprightliness are cardinal virtues in women ; and if, in addition, there is good sense as well as good looks and education," he added, making me a courteous bow, "a man has all the guarantee he requires for the happiness of his home." Since Adams had taken the absolute command of my toilet, and I suffered her to dress me as she liked, there was a sensible difference in the colonel's appreciation of me. Once or twice he had gratified me by calling upon Victor to remark how well his wife was looking. It was weak of me, no doubt, but being true, I may as well confess it. My husband was always kind and gentle in his bearing towards me, but I was not satisfied. A passionate craving existed to be lifted nearer to his heart—a longing for a greater oneness of life and feeling. The love he evinced for his children showed the warmth of his disposition. I was not envious of them ;

they had an earlier claim upon his affection ; but I should have been glad of some more demonstrative token of his approbation than that which reached me through the occasional compliments of the colonel. Though it did not come, Victor gave me no tangible cause of complaint ; I was a second wife ; the title so new to me was robbed of its principal endearment to him by the hard memory that stood between us. Time, patience, a careful attention to his little ones, would, I hoped, by degrees, ensure me tenderness ; yet in Hubert's persistent dislike, and the nurse's enmity, I had serious obstacles to surmount. To fight against a strong sense of loneliness, I felt that I wanted a friend.

A secret sympathy drew me towards Miss Everett ; the colonel's disparagement of her had a different effect from what he intended—it made me more desirous to make her acquaintance, and increased my mortifica-

tion that she had omitted the courtesy I thought my due. In some way or other I was resolved to approach her. That calm, serene brow awakened in me a feeling akin to envy; she had passed through the fiery trial of a great bereavement, and yet her features bore the impress of an ineffable peace, which considerably enhanced their beauty. To me she was strikingly lovely; her bright eyes were dark but sweet, and her rosy lips defined admirably her small, well-shaped mouth. Her smile, I fancied, must be bewitching. Saying something of the kind, I was surprised at eliciting only a cold response from a man so alive to personal attractions as the colonel. For some cause or other he did not like her.

We were in the beginning of September. The day was one of sunshine, clear and golden; the fresh air stirred tenderly the bronzed leaves that hung half-drooping on their stems. During the morning little feet

were heard in unusual places, on the stairs, in the hall, and voices out of doors besides ; for Grover made it a special holiday, and relaxed even the little discipline she usually maintained. The visitors were expected before luncheon, and Victor, himself more animated, and with the appearance of more energy than was habitual to him, was gone to fetch them from the station. I would rather have prepared myself for the ordeal of presentation to the mother and sister of the first Mrs. Demarcay by sitting alone, but the colonel wanted me. By an irony of circumstances, my greatest support and protection came from that member of the family for whom I had the smallest esteem ; nay, from whom in my secret soul I shrank with fear and repulsion. I read the papers, not as usual, for my thoughts wandered and built up airy castles in spite of myself. Victor had looked so cheerful that morning — what if these new guests, caring for his

happiness, joined and sustained me in contributing towards it? What if, anxious for the children's welfare, they understood and seconded my efforts to make them estimable and good? I had no wish to trespass on the past, only to colour the future a little brightly. So much depended upon the characters of Mrs. and Miss Rogers. Once or twice I paused in my reading without knowing, until the colonel, by repeating the last word rather shortly, recalled my attention. On the whole he was patient, until Hubert, forgetting in his boyish excitement the sacredness of his uncle's study, burst open the door, shouting aloud, "They are coming! they are coming! the carriage is just here!"

The lecture due to his inadvertence he escaped, by rushing away before Colonel Demarcay could sufficiently recover from his surprise to speak. The result fell upon me, for I had to finish the paragraph, and listen



to some not very interesting remarks upon it, before the colonel would move or let me go. Perhaps it was this delay that threw a constraint over the meeting. The carriage had driven off, and Mrs. and Miss Rogers were installed in the drawing-room when I got there. Victor was standing in the hall, and asked me, rather stiffly, where I had been, as he was waiting to present me to his mother and sister-in-law, whom he had detained downstairs for that purpose.

The introduction and its effects were not what I expected. Inward vexation had taken the place of the cordial welcome I intended to give, and I was too natural, too blunt in my manners, to force or feign more cordiality than I felt. On their part, they were critical and frigid. A glance was sufficient to show that they did not like me.

Mrs. Rogers, a stout, fair woman, who evidently took life easily, might not trouble

herself with a feeling of enmity of any kind; but her daughter, small and slight as she was, had the traits and signs of a strong character, or, it may be more correct to call it, a high temper. The natural tendencies of a quick, undisciplined mind should not come under the classification that seems to imply a thoughtful training or determined shaping of means and ways to a proposed end.

Her raven-coloured hair, piled in thick masses on her head, and lying in curls on her low brow, gave a hard look to her countenance, which was only partially subdued by the deep rich colour on her cheeks. Contrary to the laws of beauty, her most agreeable feature was the nose, decidedly *retroussé*, which relieved the heavy expression by adding a certain piquancy to the face, keeping the observer expectant rather than satisfied. Dark eyes and dazzling white teeth contributed their charms, though

all these personal advantages combined failed in producing on me an agreeable impression. It was otherwise with Hubert ; he stood by her side, one hand clasped in hers, the other holding a small travelling-bag with which he had vociferously asked to be entrusted. Nora, whose little inconstant heart went forth readily to new-comers, was caressing her grandmamma with the appearance of real affection, though in the morning every word of longing had been for Aunt Bertha. With this proof of the varying nature of her regard, it was foolish of me to feel as I did the defection of my little favourite.

Colonel Demarcay alone appeared uninfluenced by the new arrivals, beyond the respectful attentions he thought as much due to himself as to them. Must I own that my ruffled feelings were soothed by his deference to me, and by the ostentatious way in which he noticed any remark that came from me ? Perforce I felt a little

gratitude, and yet it was mixed too much with bitterness to be a pleasing sensation. It was some relief that, instead of asking me to drive with him that afternoon, he left me to my duties as hostess.

While Victor strolled about with his sister-in-law, Mrs. Rogers fell to my share, and we passed a weary while in maintaining a conversation in which neither took any real interest, until my companion, excusing herself on the plea of fatigue after her journey, retired to her room and left me alone. The better to enjoy my own welcome companionship, I seated myself in a small room, or rather recess, adjoining the general saloon, from which it was separated by heavy folds of drapery. From the window I watched, at first idly and without interest, the two who were pacing up and down the gravel terrace close by. Victor's tall figure was a great contrast to the diminutive one by his side. So it must have been with her sister,

the loved and cherished wife, whose place I had so unwisely taken. Judging from appearances, there was almost an exaggeration of energy in the small person who planted her feet so firmly, and talked with a decision overpowering to my silent husband. Imperative gestures supplemented the eagerness of her conversation, to which Victor was compelled to listen, though with a deprecating manner he made several fruitless attempts to interrupt her. Tired at last, or failing to agree, they approached the window next to the one where I sat with the curtain behind me. Victor threw up the sash, saying as he did so, "Let it rest, Bertha ; what is done cannot be undone. Could your sister know all, she would approve rather than blame."

"But you promised. Oh, Victor ! how can a man who is a man so lightly break his word ?"

"In the letter only I have done so, not in

the spirit," he answered. "As I have already told you, I was influenced by no personal feeling, but solely for the interest of the children."

"How can I bear to see a stranger here?" sobbed Bertha Rogers; and passionately rushing on into tones of undisguised contempt, she added, "Man easily reconciles himself to the changes he finds expedient. A broken promise is nothing to him when the stain of it is only known at home."

"Bertha! Bertha! you are wilfully unjust and unkind," exclaimed Victor, with a dash of impatience in his voice. "Remember that this marriage was against my heart's consent, and solely to insure to Anna's children the fortune we had a right to expect for them, but which the caprice of the colonel was prepared to withhold, except upon the terms that so offend you. Your sister would have wished me to make the concession, and would have been satisfied

with knowing that no other has, or ever will have, the power to awaken in me a love which is unfading and unchanging. Don't blame me, Bertha, but rather help me to bear the burden of a loss which after four years is as vivid as yesterday."

Though in a vague kind of way I felt myself to be the stranger alluded to by Bertha Rogers, it was not till Victor began to answer, and my blood tingled at the first few words he spoke, that I at all realized myself to be hearing something not intended for my ears, and when I did so there was no strength for action left in me. On their entrance I had raised the curtain for the purpose of joining them. Bertha I saw in front of me, and thought she saw me, but I must have been mistaken.

Startled by Victor's vehement and rapid utterance, the drapery fell from my hand, leaving me as if transfixed to the spot, and he was at the end of his passionate defence

before I could sufficiently recover from the shock to see or feel what ought to be done. One resolve was paramount. Though willing to face my husband, I could not encounter his sister-in-law, nor give her the triumph of knowing that I was acquainted with my position. "There could be nothing more for me to hear, the worst had been said," I mentally argued as the excuse for saving my pride by waiting till Bertha was gone before I showed myself. My feelings were lacerated to the utmost. What could come nearer to breaking a wife's heart, if she loved, or embitter life, than to find her tenderness of so little account? If my affection had been chilled, or left undeveloped by Victor's cold manners and stately courtesies, it had existed, and was ready to lighten up at his pleasure, requiring only the magic spark of his attachment to kindle into flame. Suddenly, and with a sound in my head as a torch makes when plunged



into water, it seemed to go out. My limbs quivering as much as my nerves, I dropped into the nearest chair, drawing heavily the breath which seemed inclined to stop altogether, and only returned in gasps. But I would not be conquered. Shaking off with a determined effort the icy grip laid upon me, I tried to think, unfortunately to little purpose. Amid repeated attempts to arrange my thoughts so as to settle beforehand how to address my husband, my head swam. A mist obscured the objects around me; I could neither find the doorway nor raise the curtain. Hands and feet refused to move, and yet I could not be said to be insensible.

The simple drawing-room at Rosewood, with its dear inhabitants, was mixed up with my handsome chamber at Lorndale and the broad terrace below, where my husband and Colonel Demarcay were walking and talking on the day of my arrival. But I seemed to be in neither place, only waiting somewhere

for Victor, who was coming presently, as soon as he had done speaking to Agnes.

“Then you do not care for your new wife ? yours is not a marriage of inclination, but of convenience ? yet even so I cannot forgive you.”

“Agnes ! Agnes !” I called out in horror at such words proceeding from her lips, and anxious to stop her from saying more. The attempt to speak, reviving my scattered senses, enabled me to distinguish where I was, aided by other sounds that by degrees made me conscious who had been the speaker, and strengthened my resolution to wait.

Oh ! how I longed to make known my presence to Victor. Would Bertha never go ? The delay was almost more than I could bear, and yet I was resolved not to stir while she was there ; I could not meet my triumphant enemy eye to eye. Happily for my fast-failing powers of self-restraint, complete silence followed this last question.

Bertha was perhaps satisfied ; if not, she did not think it worth while to contend further. Incensed, as well as wounded, incapable of reasoning calmly—on the contrary, with my mental faculties numbed by the force of the blow, and by the coldness that could delineate the situation so calmly, I yet felt all its bitterness and my helplessness. The new guests were more to Mr. Demarcay than I was, having the privilege of a confidence never to be accorded to me. Without the colonel's support I had no influence in the house ; without the children I had no tie to my husband. Was I glad or sorry to have obtained this insight into his mind ? The usual lot of listeners had been mine ; my punishment was severe, though the act had been involuntary at first, and, according to my reasoning, compulsory afterwards. But henceforth all should be open between us ; concealment should be at an end. I would face the truth and compel Victor to

see that I did so. A certain fierce courage sustained me, not for reproaches— at that moment they were not even contemplated— but to let him know that every word spoken to soothe the irritated spirit of his sister-in-law had fallen with incisive distinctness on the ear of his wife.

After a few seconds more of impatient waiting, the door opened and closed. As no echo of footsteps had preceded the sound, I concluded it was Bertha Rogers who had left the room, and raised the damask drapery.

## CHAPTER XI.

MY husband was standing before the window with his back towards me, and alone, too absorbed in his own thoughts to notice the movement of the curtain. His profile, as I saw it, had its usual expression. Stepping close to him unperceived, I laid a detaining hand upon his arm, as if the sight of me would induce him to make an effort to escape.

“Victor!”—the voice did not sound like mine, though I know I spoke, and called him by name. Bertha Rogers did so; I would not lose the semblance of familiarity, poor as it was. The quick start he gave made me grasp him all the tighter, resolved

that a complete understanding should now be established. "Victor, I could not help overhearing much that you and Miss Rogers have been saying. Don't say you are sorry or vexed;" for his face, after flushing to a deep red, turned pale, and, by his manner, I thought he was going to express regret, or perhaps to blame me. "I am not sorry to have obtained a clear explanation of what might otherwise have gone on puzzling and irritating me all my life. The first hour of my arrival at Lorndale, some fragments of your conversation with Colonel Demarcay reached me from the terrace below, where you were walking. My appearance had not pleased him, and you were endeavouring to reconcile him to the choice you had made. To be frank, I did not like some of your expressions, though I was far from giving them their true meaning."

I thought I had self-command to speak calmly; most earnestly I wished to do so,

but the desperate character of my position overcame me. It was so cold, so lonely, so utterly miserable and helpless, that the wounded self, rebelling against its fate, and smarting deeply under the blow that had shivered at a stroke its natural buoyancy, brooked no control.

“Victor, Victor Demarcay,” I exclaimed in my passionate grief, “was it well, was it kind, to take me from those who valued me and transplant me into a loveless home?—was it right to sever me from the ties I possessed and give me nothing, absolutely nothing, in return? Do you know—can a man fathom the sorrow of which a woman’s heart is capable? Why did you not suffer your uncle to take a wife for himself—would it not have been more just, more manly? Why must I be chained to the wheel like a slave, doomed to his uncongenial society, for hours, and days, and weeks, and years, in order that children, strangers to me, should

be enriched? What had I done that such a lot should be assigned to me?"

Sinking into the nearest chair, my head fell upon my hands, which were clasped together on the table. Too proud to give audible expression to my emotion, resenting even the idea that Victor should perceive it, I struggled violently against myself. My heaving shoulders, as I resolutely forced down the rising sobs, may perhaps have betrayed me, but nothing else. No more was said; the outward expression of my indignation had spent itself, and no word came from my husband. Motionless and dumb, he was probably going through a process of enlightenment that astonished and held him mute. This way of stating the case was a revelation of other depths of feeling than his own. How he took my reproaches, or how long the silence would have lasted, I cannot tell. My quick ear suddenly caught the sound of light footsteps in the



hall, which made me raise my head, thinking it was Bertha returning.

“Stop her, stop her. I cannot see Miss Rogers so. Spare me at least that humiliation,” I cried vehemently, and dropping my head again, my sorrow was so bitter. He hurried forward, and out of the room, just in time to prevent her from entering, and then followed the murmur of voices outside the door, which he had carefully closed after him. By the expression of concern upon my face as he stood looking down upon me when I lifted my head, I felt sure he would respect my feelings and protect me from her curiosity, if possible. By waiting until they moved away, there was the hope of regaining my apartment unobserved. Self-possession must be acquired in some way or other before I faced again my life or my companions. The time seemed long. I thought the talking would never cease as I sat and listened, with dry eyes now, the smaller

anxiety of getting away unseen having for the moment imposed silence upon deeper and more turbulent emotions. At length my husband put in his head, saying, "No one is in the hall now, Ella; you had better pass through at once;" and standing with the door in his hand, he seemed prepared to assist my retreat. On rising to follow his advice a new cause for distress presented itself. My hands had been resting on a strange, handsomely bound book—alas! for the beauty of its blue and elegantly gilt cover; some round marks, too expressive of their origin, stared me in the face, and the book was Miss Bertha's album. To efface them was impossible; to let her know that she had wrung from me such bitter, bitter tears was gall and wormwood. Irresolute what to do, I stood with it in my hand, trying to think how I should avoid the mortification of discovery if Miss Rogers, as was probable, made a stir about the accident that

had befallen her property, when my husband, opening the door wider, spoke again : "Now, Ella, now, or it will be too late."

Dashing down the album, which fell upon the floor, and not stooping to pick it up, I hurried into the hall and gained the staircase just as Miss Rogers, issuing from the library, called Victor to answer some question about the post. Gaining my own room, I fastened myself in, with a feeling of extreme satisfaction at having so successfully effected my escape ; for one short moment the lesser annoyance had swallowed up the greater. Then throwing myself on the nearest fauteuil, I covered my face. In that way I shut out the new surroundings of luxury and elegance that had now become hateful to me. Alas ! I could do no more ; I could not appease the wild tumult within, nor shut out the thoughts that were beating on my brain. Each word overheard returned with vivid distinctness, one after the other,

completing and rounding each hard sentence with the very echoes of the voices that spoke them—the sharp irritated and irritating accents of Bertha Rogers, as well as the earnest deprecating tones of Victor. He had apologized to her for his marriage, which he called one of necessity. Though alone, my face flushed with resentment and wounded pride, aggravated as these feelings were by the reflection that I had heard the unvarnished truth. Allowing that Victor Demarcay's principal object was to reconcile Bertha to his marriage, it was nevertheless a fact that he turned his mind inside out for its justification. I was the choice between two evils, not the wife selected to make home happier or his existence brighter. I secured Colonel Demarcay's property to the children. Innocent as they were, in the anguish of this remembrance I lost all interest in their welfare. How well I now understood why I had obtained the pre-

ference over others. An orphan, in poor circumstances, was I not sufficiently honoured by the transition from poverty to wealth—from an hourly toil for my daily bread under the authority of others, to independence and affluence—when no conscious principle whispered that honest labour, with a free heart, might be better than enforced duties with an aching one? The change offered me had an intrinsic value; what mattered the rest? What did it signify if the spirit drooped, if the days were weary, if cold shadows hung over my life, which from its attribute of youth alone ought to enjoy some sunshine! It was nothing to any one that I was deprived of it, that sweet sunshine in its best form, which God gives so beneficently through the affections, their claims and their satisfaction—it was nothing to any one but myself. Unhappily, it was much to me; so much, that in the recoil of the hard blow I could not reason. My

nature began to harden, to long to deal blows in return for the one I had received. By an injustice to which my wounded feelings must have blinded me, the force of my indignation was soon directed against Colonel Demarcay. He, not Victor, was the most to blame, in urging him to a step for which he had no inclination, and upon him I longed to wreak some little vengeance for what he had brought upon me.

The way in which this resentment was testified was childish, indeed, but it was all in my power at present. Collecting every one of his costly presents—and they were many—I tumbled them promiscuously into a drawer and locked them up, intending to return them on the first opportunity, giving the donor at the same time the keen reproaches that pride and a conflict of other feelings withheld me from addressing to my husband. From the window I again saw Victor ; he was pacing slowly under the trees.

Was he thinking of me, and of the hard situation in which he had placed me? Possibly, for he was naturally kind-hearted, and did not like either to see or to cause sorrow. But, ponder as he would, he could do nothing to mitigate mine. Forced into speaking the truth, he could no more erase from my memory the words spoken, than he could obliterate from the stone the watermark of long-buried ages.

As I watched his tall figure, now losing some of its natural grace by a certain mournfulness of attitude, the pity which is born of love chased away my previous anger. He was dear, very dear to me; I could not deceive myself into a feeling of indifference. Without regretting the harsh words spoken, and still thinking them just and well-deserved, I determined never to reproach him again. "What was the use?" I asked, bitterly; "no one was ever yet the better for querulous upbraidings." His respect I

possessed; that and my own self-esteem were yet in my power to retain, and should not lightly be thrown away. Not then, however, did I make the calm *résumé* of his circumstances that I was able to do afterwards, and which he had so distinctly drawn for Bertha's benefit. I was absorbed with my own case. Victor had deceived me, and for that I blamed him. If he could not give me the tenderness to which a wife has a right, he should have given me a sincere declaration of facts, leaving me to make or decline with my eyes open the sacrifice required. It would be useless to tell of the many thoughts that crowded through my mind, but they gradually shaped themselves into a feeling that any change must come from my own resolution. Victor could do nothing, and I felt pity replacing anger, knowing the vexation that must now be oppressing him.

A jealous vision of the feebleness of the



character he was lamenting, gathered from the stray remarks of the colonel and small incidents casually mentioned, presented itself. Almost resentfully, I asked if no quality was in my possession, or in my power to acquire, which should raise me to a level with this pretty doll, and hated myself all the while, both for the ungenerous disparagement and for the envy that caused it.

What was I to do? To rise and work; to line my fetters with such feelings of submission and such principles as I could lay hold of, or to break them? To return to Rosewood would be humiliating; to remain at Lorndale with my bitter knowledge always lying as a dead weight on my heart, would be equally hard.

This, however, was my resolution—my only choice, as it seemed to me, if I would not do the wrong that others had done, and regard as light and fragile the vows made before God and man. Working with instead

of against a trial converts it into a blessing. Perhaps something of the kind would happen to me if I bore my trouble meekly, and toiled bravely to keep evil thoughts and passions from my heart. I could not be loved, I would be esteemed.

We are strange complex beings. The absence of joy to which I resigned myself produced in me a complacency that was soothing ; the fierce heat of my anger passed away. I saw that my position had duties to fill up my time, and perhaps some recompense hereafter in the children. Hubert I could not win because Grover was always working against me ; but some day he would escape from her influence—school-time must come. He was too frank and fearless to grow up unjust—that quality belongs to weak and feeble natures. From his justice in the future I must look for my reward ; meanwhile, there was Nora, a little, impulsive, inconstant thing ; yet she had gentle, en-

dearing ways. Already I had begun to love her, and felt a glow of pleasure when her rosy lips met mine, whispering, as she sometimes did when no one was near, "Dear mamma, I love you." She had deserted me to-day in favour of her aunt, but to-morrow she would be my little pet again.

"Esteem! Yes, I will compel his esteem," I said, softly and triumphantly, thinking that I would so act as to heap coals of fire upon his head.

The pleasant picture sustained my sorrowful spirit for a time, and then I fell to weeping. Weak and miserable, all my good resolutions were swept away. The vehement sobbings ceased after a while, and tears flowed freely—not in bitterness, as at first, like the large drops preceding a thunderstorm, but more as the gentle rain that refreshes the parched earth, and I could not stop crying. Natures like mine, strong to resist at first, are feeble enough

when they once give way. A very storm of grief was venting itself in paroxysms of tears, when a rough touch plucked at the handkerchief in which my face was buried.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE intruder was Nettle, Hubert's favourite terrier, who, by standing on her hind legs, was able to reach a dangling corner of the handkerchief that covered my eyes. Her kindly brute nature, touched by the unwonted spectacle of violent emotion, offered me the first sympathy my trouble received. How came she there in corporeal substance as she was no invited visitor into my apartment, and I had carefully fastened the door? Only a second did the question remain unanswered, for on glancing round I perceived Hubert standing in the doorway leading to the small cabinet which had an exit on to the passage. Adams used it more frequently than I, which may account for my having

forgotten the circumstance, when, dashing to the other door, I fastened it and thought myself alone.

Though the child's large blue eyes were fixed upon me in curious wonder, he did not speak ; only when our glances met he stirred, and, bounding forward, claimed Nettle, scolding her with a volubility not usual with him for having dared to go in *there*. Without noticing me in any way, he dragged her towards the door, where he turned and looked shyly back, lecturing Nettle all the time, and then disappeared as suddenly as he came. Often had I tried by indirect kindnesses to lure him to my room, but in vain. Whether in obedience to a positive command from Grover, or because his chivalrous spirit would not fail in the slightest allegiance to his nurse, who taught him that he could not be friends with both of us, he never would accompany his sister. This was the first time he had crossed my

threshold ; it was not his fault that the visit was so ill-timed. Though regretting that he had come then, because not knowing how he might describe what he had seen, his appearance had one good effect—it roused me from the indulgence of useless grief. Disturbed so abruptly, I rose, dried my eyes, and looked about me, astonished at the change in everything around. Victor was gone from under the trees, and was no more in sight ; gone, too, was the Michaelmas glory of the flowers, the earth, and the sky, for there was no capacity in me to appreciate them ; and gone also, and from the same cause, was the beauty of the brown woods, now dressed in their russet garb, with the golden light falling on their thousand leaves. The breath of a keen disappointment passing over me had rifled them of their charms, leaving only a dead monotony of green and amber colouring.

“There is always joy somewhere.” One

of the poets said so, and must have been right, for poets have an intuitive sense of many things in the world of fact, as well as of imagination, which our duller minds are slow to receive. Not that it makes us any the happier to think that others are gay and glad when we sigh and moan and wear our hearts away with suffering and repining. I thought this when sounds of laughter and of merry voices were borne towards me by the clear, crisp air through the window near which I stood, vaguely wondering what to do next, and how I should meet and conduct myself towards the visitors, and my husband, and Colonel Demarcay, on going downstairs. They came, these unexpected sounds from light hearts, with a jarring effect upon me, not lessened when I perceived below Bertha Rogers dancing with the children and the dogs, stopping every now and then to make a rush at Victor with some laughing words upon her tongue, as, with his mother-in-law



on his arm, he thoughtfully accommodated his pace to hers.

Unseen, I watched them, and saw how happy they were without me ; all of them, children and husband and Mrs. and Miss Rogers. Hubert shouted and ran after Nero, who leaped and barked, and at last, knocking down the excited boy, stood over him and pinned him to the ground, punishing, as it were, his many pranks by keeping him a prisoner, while Nettle took that opportunity of licking his face. Nora, clapping her little hands, added to the noise by screaming with delight. Victor's fine-cut features were all the handsomer for the pleasure they expressed in seeing how dexterously Hubert extricated himself. Pushing Nettle away with scolding words, mixed with laughter, he recommenced the chase, as much to the dog's satisfaction as his own. Presently Colonel Demarcay came upon the lawn, and, after joining the others, glanced around as

if some one were missing. Was he looking for me? Probably, for I was some one in the eyes of this man, who was nothing to me, and by him alone my absence was felt or noticed. By degrees, as he walked beside Mrs. Rogers with his stately tread, the children's fun ceased; they or the dogs were tired or lost the inclination to play. Bertha went away with them, and Victor's face resumed its usual mild, serious expression. All the brightness his son's pranks had called forth died out of it as their young voices ceased to echo round him. One thing I learned from the scene below—that my husband's happiness might yet be revived through the parental affections; but where was my share?

Conscious, after a time, of having too long neglected the duties of a hostess, I dressed early that I might be downstairs to receive our guests before dinner, hoping that the excuse of a headache would account for my

heavy eyes and swollen lids. Victor was at the door of his dressing-room as I passed; he looked at me hard but irresolute, as if wishing but half afraid to speak, which was not surprising, so vehement was the language I had but lately addressed to him. I went on without turning my head; what could he say to efface the cruel words yet ringing in my ears? Besides, I was fearful of losing the little self-command I possessed, obtained too with such difficulty. If this were a chance of a better understanding between us I lost it; my husband made no further attempt to speak to me in private, and seemed to acquiesce in the complete alienation for which I was prepared.

In the hall was Hubert, who, on seeing me descend the stairs, pointed to my feet with a burst of laughter. Glancing downwards, I perceived that I wore slippers, and odd ones, a distraction arising from having partially dressed myself before ringing for Adams.

"Not so noisy, Hubert; you are a rough, rude boy," I heard the voice of Colonel Demarcay say, as I hastily turned back.

"Why, she had odd shoes on—one light and the other dark!"

"She!" repeated the colonel; "who taught you to speak so of your new mamma? Every one has a name, and is to be called by it."

My having occasioned him this reproof from his uncle was probably the cause of the sulky look on Hubert's face when I afterwards entered the room, and also made him draw away from his grandmother as I took my seat beside her. Mrs. Rogers accepted my apology and expressed concern for my headache, saying, as she looked at my half-averted face, it was evident that I was suffering pain. She was too kind-hearted a woman to bear me a grudge for the innocent offence of having succeeded her daughter, and, without Bertha, would have been an agreeable visitor.

"A headache, Mrs. Demarcay? then that is the reason I have not seen you this afternoon," said the colonel, coming quickly towards me.

It was not his eyes so much as Hubert's that caused my cheeks to flush with pain and anxiety. I did not wish it to be known that I had been weeping, and was afraid of marring in his young mind my character for truthfulness. He did not, as I feared, blurt out what he had seen, for the entrance of the others made a diversion. Bertha came, with Nora chattering and clinging to her hand, and was soon followed by Victor.

The colonel, seated in front of Mrs. Rogers and me, was talking on subjects that did not interest me. Forced conversations never have either the sense or sparkle of those that flow from a full head, or from a gay, satisfied heart.

An exclamation from the other side of

the room brought the guilty blood to my hot cheek.

“What is this? Who has spoilt my beautiful new album?”

The voice was Bertha's, who stood surveying the spotted cover with genuine dismay. Victor moved forward, and, taking it out of her hand, turned it round several times, my eyes watching him all the while with a fascinated gaze. I could see the tear blots from where I sat.

“It is quite spoilt,” said Bertha, “and I only bought it yesterday. Who could have done it?”

“I picked it up from the floor this afternoon; it was all right then—at least I thought so,” observed Victor, his eyes fixed upon the unfortunate stains—spots that had run into each other. “It is happily a new purchase, you say—your own, and not a souvenir. Tell me where you bought it, Bertha, and I will get you another, the

very counterpart, if I have it made on purpose."

"And what will you do with the old one?" asked Hubert, pressing up to his father.

"Confiscate it!"

"Confis—confis-*cake*; what is that?" asked the boy, from the seat into which he had thrown himself, clapping his heels together in a boisterous way, very disconcerting to the fastidious nerves of the colonel.

"Will you ever succeed in teaching that unkempt child to behave with propriety?" he observed to me; "good company seems so uncongenial to him, that it is difficult to believe he is a Demarcay."

Uneasy about the child, who always coloured under his uncle's rebukes, and generally proceeded to some greater offence immediately, I longed to say something kind, or do something to turn his attention away from himself, but the fear of

his blurting out some wounding word, difficult to endure in the presence of these relatives, checked the advances I would willingly have made.



In looking towards Hubert my eyes met my husband's. They were sad and melancholy, and earnest, too, with a certain touching pathos in them, looking deprecatingly into mine, as if asking pardon for the pain he caused.

My poor Victor ! he could not love me, his heart was still aching with a great sorrow. That little wife, pretty if foolish, had gathered and exhausted all its freshness ; the strength and beauty of the flower were gone, the fragrance remaining was in the memories with which I had nothing to do. For me there was no entrance into the life where the spirit lives and suffers or rejoices ; my place was in the outer, where the warmth of confidence, faith, and intercommunion does not come.




Before closing my eyes in sleep that evening, I had thought out the mode of life I would adopt. My better spirit was sad for Victor ; but sometimes, alas ! it was bitter for myself, and I could not always help the wearied, listless look it evidently pained him to see, and which usually increased the coldness between us. The strongest temptation I had to combat was the oft-recurring idea of leaving Lorndale. But where to go ? If, sacrificing my pride, I returned to my uncle's house, the old occupation with Agnes was gone. After Christmas Mrs. Monckton's wishes were to be carried out, and she was to go to school. Any other employment was, I knew, out of the question ; Colonel Demarcay would never suffer one who bore his name to forego that barren honour for the sweets of independence, nor could I wish to live a pensioner upon my uncle. The soldier that quits his post because it is a hard one must justly bear the brand of

cowardice and shame. In the great army vowed to war against the world, the flesh, and the devil, I was also a soldier, fighting under the banner that leads to a glory which never fades. The duties fixed for us we may not avoid nor neglect without attaining our honour. I might not untie the knot which, however foolishly formed, bound me in the sight of God and man. "Till death us do part"—so ran the solemn words I had so lightly spoken, and from which I saw at present no lawful way of escape. Two courses were before me—like the caged bird exhausting its strength in fruitless efforts after sunshine and liberty, to droop and pine, or to rise and work with such energy as I could command. I chose the latter, believing that there is no spot on earth where some duty does not exist—no circumstances which it cannot in some measure beguile—steps upwards which can never be regretted. I could do something for some one ; there was



a place in this household for me. Was it worse than being in the family of a stranger? Honestly reflecting, it was far better, if only I could forget myself.

Having sobbed away the first acute pain that held me with a grip so tight and hard, I forced myself to examine my lot by such light as my reason gave me. It was not very comforting, but it was something. No one interfered with me. I slept, rose, talked a little, smiled a little, and took my place as the new mistress of Lorndale, ordering and providing for the guests with what ability I possessed. No previous knowledge fitted me to conduct a household like that of Lorndale, but I had observation and keen perception. With Mrs. Dixon's help I was able to avoid mistakes. The colonel seemed to like me, and Victor, seeing his uncle pleased, went his own way and left me to myself. My character was forming under a stern discipline. I felt that I had become



stronger through my grief. Ultimately I was the better for it, but during the process I became sometimes more brusque than nature made me, and my face became hard at times, with a hardness that startled me, when I saw it in the glass. Whether Colonel Demarcay perceived it or not, he was uniformly courteous—so much so, that now and then occurred the amusing thought that he was endeavouring to improve my manners by the exaggerated suavity of his own.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THESE were happy times for the children, who, either with their grandmother or aunt, were much downstairs, quiet and obedient for a few minutes, at others merry as crickets, and quite as noisy. Colonel Demarcay claimed my services, keeping me sometimes reading to him for many hours. He had suffered from ophthalmia when in the East, and gladly spared his eyes by the exercise of mine, occasionally endeavouring to reward me by comparisons between the two Mrs. Demarcays, always in my favour. The former never read to him; she could not, he said, get through two lines without stumbling, and those she could read

she did not understand. To hear him talk, Anna Demarcay was a little, flaxen-haired toy, with as much sense in her head as you find in a German doll; to her mother and sister she was a lost angel, beautiful as a flower when on earth, and now a saint in heaven. To Victor she was as the sun to the world, as the dew to the earth, as the voice of song to the life of a bird.

Mrs. Rogers and her daughter, knowing how my mornings were generally employed, found their own amusements, and had it all their own way at Lorndale. In my absence Victor did the honours, and was a kind, attentive son, attending to the old lady's wishes, and gentle and patient with Bertha, whom I thought sometimes imperious and exacting. With me she was indifferent, but not disagreeable—perhaps because, being so much with Colonel Demarcay, my presence was seldom a restraint upon her.

One afternoon in the middle of September the children were to have a treat, the prospect of which had set Hubert's legs and Nora's tongue in movement all the morning. Their mother's relatives had taken the charge of them very much off my hands. Nevertheless, in the interest of Nora, I enjoined rest by way of preparation for the anticipated pleasure. It was to be a nutting party; Bertha had planned it; she and Victor, the children and Grover, and their tall cousin, as old as their papa, who was expected that day, were to compose it. Hubert was never tired, he said, and told his aunt that he could run about all the morning, and walk just as well in the afternoon. As she clearly took his part, I yielded that point, but insisted upon little Nora coming indoors. In a passion of tears the child resisted, and finally bit my hand to make me let go.

"Oh, Nora!" I said, reproachfully, "you

know I am only trying to make the whole afternoon one of pleasure to you, and wish you to be a little quiet now, that you may enjoy yourself the more. If you are tired, you will not be happy."

"You don't, you don't; you tell stories; Hubert says so, and nurse says she knows it too. You are cross, and not nice, and don't love us a bit; and I won't love you either, any more than Hubert does."

All this she said with her dark eyes flashing like little sparks; and, finding I did not relax my hold, in spite of her kicking and twisting, she threw herself down on the grass. I could have cried with sorrow and mortification as my pet and plaything, turning recreant, ignored our past affectionate intercourse, and, unconscious of my solicitude for her, put me to such grief and shame, with Bertha and Hubert looking on. For a moment principle went down before my cowardice, and I thought of leaving her



to her temper and her aunt, though knowing that she would be the worse for it, as correction from me was likely to be misconstrued. She had wriggled herself free, and was lying on the grass, screaming with all the force of her lungs, while I stood by debating with myself what was best to be done. "Get up, Nora," I said, gravely, with a heavy weight at my heart, from the difficulty I foresaw in carrying out the training which was to make her gentle, good, and loving, my sole reward out of the onerous duties that lay before me; "if you throw so much strength away in naughty passion now, you will be ill by-and-by."

The calm, cold tone struck the child as strange; for Nurse Grover was accustomed to meet passion with passion, even with Hubert, when he offended her. With Nora this was of frequent occurrence, and brought many a slap upon her young shoulders. Once I forbade the hasty punishment, when

Mrs. Grover pertly replied that she knew what she was doing, and loved the children better than I did. I intended to mention the circumstance to Victor and get him to interfere, but the Rogers family arrived, and then came that cruel revelation of facts made to Bertha, and since I had no will, no desire, to talk to him about the children. I meant to do well by them as far as I could, exercising my best judgment in their behalf, but had no inclination to put myself forward as one to whom he ought to feel obliged.

"Get up, Nora, or I shall leave you there." A happy thought, for though the threat involved nothing particularly disagreeable for the child, it was still a threat, and one I could carry out.

"Oh, Miss Nora, that I should have lived to see this day!" said a voice close by. It was Patrick at one of the back windows, looking on the spot where this scene was passing.

"Get up, Nora," said another voice; "nurse is coming."

The second speaker was Hubert, who, by dint of hard tugging, got his sister on her feet just as Mrs. Grover reached us.

"Hey-day! What is the matter now? what is it, my own darling?" and because she had some inkling of the truth, she threw her arms round the still sobbing child, and pressed her to her bosom, saying, "Tell me all about it, dear; who has hurt you, who has scolded my pet?"

"No one," said Hubert, boldly; "Nora has been in a passion."

He stood in front of us, a fine picture, his face flushed with play and excitement, wishing to be just, and to speak the truth.

"Who put her in a passion?" asked Grover.

That question changed the face of things, and presented an intricacy of thought which at once arrested his championship. Deeper

he could not reason ; he gave me a perplexed look, and after the silence of a second rejoined Bertha, who stood aloof all the time. I do not think he thought me entirely in the right, and yet Nora was decidedly naughty. The question, Who put her in a passion ? presented a difficulty to his childish comprehension. "It was the taking her indoors that did it," I heard him say to his aunt when he left us.

The battle was now between me and Grover. Sooner or later I knew it must come, and also that I must win it or lose all hope of being useful to the children, and through them to my husband. To leave Nora under Grover's influence at the present moment would be an abdication of authority, which I should ever after regret. Now or never must I stand my ground. There was, I fear, some pride in the resolution ; I hope and believe there was some principle also, for the effort was

painful and the result uncertain. "Miss Nora cannot go with you now, nurse," I said, firmly, taking the child's other hand as Grover was about to lead her away; "she has been very naughty, and must be brought to understand her misconduct before she can be forgiven."

I had too much regard for Nora's truthfulness to insist upon those expressions of regret that are too thoughtlessly put into children's mouths before their little hearts are touched.

"Oh, my poor motherless lamb, how hard it goes with you! Come to your dear old nurse!" burst forth Grover, opening her arms to clasp the child in another embrace, and would have succeeded had I not quickly stepped between them, speaking even more resolutely than before.

"Miss Nora will not come to you until she is good; not, I think, before her dinner, nor perhaps this afternoon."

"I will, I will, I will go to nurse!" she called out, bursting into another passion of tears and sobs, which shook her little frame.

"When you are good, and not before. Nurse must go away and leave you with me. I will have no interference when I find it necessary to reprove or to punish." Evidently she had no intention of obeying me; on the contrary, she began to drag Nora away.

"Leave her with me," I said, imperatively, "or you will compel me to appeal to your master."

From the very fitness of things, Victor, whatever his own feelings might be, must decide in my favour, but this was a step I was unwilling to take, knowing that it would be disagreeable to him, independent of the consequences that might arise. It might reach the ears of the colonel, who in his wrath was likely to vex Victor by sweeping Mrs. Grover out of the house. The threat

to which I was compelled only served to increase her anger.

“Things are come to a pretty pass !” she answered fiercely, “when children are taught to be disrespectful, and disobey the nurse who loves them so dearly. I will speak to Mr. Demarcay myself.”

Turning hastily away she went towards the house, where I had seen Victor enter about half an hour before. By suddenly snatching her hand out of mine, Nora freed herself and hurried after her. Walking a little way in pursuit, I saw her join Grover just as her skirts disappeared in the doorway of Victor's sitting-room, whither I would not follow. Going to the drawing-room instead, I found Mrs. Rogers dividing her attention between her knitting and a book. As we only exchanged occasional remarks, my thoughts were but little interrupted, one of the most painful being the fear of misconception on the part of my

husband. I had been so bitterly incensed, would he think me capable of venting my displeasure in harshness and injustice towards the children? Nora's passionate accusations, supported by the clever, malicious insinuations of Grover, would make out a case against me, and would perhaps be a picture too human to be entirely disbelieved. My conduct was surely under discussion, for before long I heard Hubert called by his father, and also the sound of his eager feet rushing through the hall. Mrs. Rogers, kept quiet by having made a mistake in her knitting, left me to the book I was ostensibly reading, but there was no sense in the lines before me. I was wondering why lots were so unequal, the distribution of good things so partial; why to some there was no sweetness, whilst others drink of a cup that has no bitterness in it, and, after life is ended, continue in the memory beloved and cherished. Of course,



I was comparing the two Mrs. Demarcays, and, I fear, arraigning the ways of Providence. If my reflections had no other effect, they beguiled the time, for I was surprised when the door opened and Victor entered, leading in his little girl, who held fast by his hand, her chest heaving slightly, but smiling her own pretty, innocent smile, like sunshine breaking through the clouds after a storm.

“My little Nora is come to ask your forgiveness ; I think—I hope she is sorry for having been so troublesome,” he said, placing her at my knee and retiring a step or two backwards.

Shyly and softly Nora laid her tiny hand upon mine and looked up into my face. I was too glad to be friends again with my little pet to wait for words of apology, too thankful also for this poor fragile link to the domestic affections, though knowing how brittle it was. It would take years of

patient training to fix that butterfly nature, and many sorrowful hours besides, I feared—many disappointments ere the goal was reached ; yet this was my best—my sole prospect of exercising the tenderness of my woman's heart. I could not bear to lose my little Nora nor her childish endearments, inconstant as I felt her to be. Lifting her on my lap, I kissed her with all the warmth of a yearning, unsatisfied affection, and then, unable to restrain myself, hid my face upon her cheek.

“Mamma is crying,” said Nora, obliging me to droop my head lower as she raised hers to look at her father ; then clasping her hands round my neck, she added, “Don't cry, dear ; I will never, never be naughty any more.”

Raining her childish kisses upon me, she said all kinds of loving words—everything that she thought would give me pleasure.

“I love you, dear ; I love you. I will

love you always, always, and I will always call you mamma, I will ; nurse and Hubert may say no, but I will, I will !”

Till then Victor had stood by in silence. Though I had not ventured to look up, I could fancy he was looking down upon us with complacency ; but now he went away softly, without a word to either of us. The door closed gently, and before long Nora was asleep in my arms. The passion and the trouble having worn her out, the song I murmured over her as she nestled down soon lulled her into a happy sleep. It is not necessary to say that she was permitted to accompany the others in the afternoon.

The weather, though autumnal, was peculiarly fine. Not an idea of the coming winter was in the gay asters and other hardy flowers that flaunted their gaudy colours in the sunshine, ignorant how short a time they yet had to live, or that that very night an ungenial frost might strike them to the heart,

and bend their upright forms, replacing their glorious beauty with sad signs of decay and death.

There were several false starts—something had been forgotten. At the last minute occurred another and a longer delay. Mrs. Rogers having made up her mind to accompany the party, greatly tried her grandson's patience by the slowness of her preparations. The baskets, hooked sticks, servants to help carry, dogs to run and bark, all were ready at last, and I watched them as they went off, talking merrily, taking a short cut over the dry grass towards the copse, where the nuts and the berries were abundant.

Colonel Demarcay, supposing me to be at home keeping Mrs. Rogers company, as I had said I would do, was out riding with the groom. Happily, he knew nothing of her change of mind, or I should not have been left to myself. Often he had offered to procure me the best lady's horse that could

be had, but, on the plea that I did not know how to ride, I always negatived the proposition, knowing well that it would only be another chain, instead of a pleasure. If Victor had asked me, or even if there had been a chance of his going with us, it would have been different; but he, like myself, showed no particular desire to be with his uncle more than he could help, and always rode alone.

The colonel had been gone some time before the party started, for they waited for the big cousin who did not come. Bertha kept them back as long as she could, until Victor said it would be too late for the children if they delayed longer. So they went at last, and I watched them from my window. The earth was dry and green, with the crisp leaves bronzed in the sun lying underfoot, and not a cloud in the sky, only a tiny fleck here and there, making the blue all the deeper. Hubert was missing

from the group, and yet I had seen him close to his father a few seconds before. Not long had I to wonder where he was. Noisy steps came suddenly outside my door, which was burst open, and the boy, panting and flushed with eagerness, rushed into the room.

"Won't you come with us? Oh, do come, do come, and make haste! Make haste, for they are all off, but we can easily run after them."

Did Hubert come of himself, or was he sent? Either way I was sorry to refuse him, and yet was in no mood to join them. Besides, I really thought they would all be happier without me. Hubert was in too great a hurry to spend much time in urging me. When in a few words I declined going, he looked at me with surprised, earnest eyes, and then ran back to the door.

"I will bring you a bunch of fives if I find it," he said, as he crossed the threshold and clattered down the stairs, shouting as

he went over the lawn, "She won't come, she won't!"

Perhaps Colonel Demarcay might then have pardoned the obnoxious pronoun had he heard it, but I am not sure; I know I did. Hubert was no favourite with him, and met with no indulgence.

The next interruption was from Adams. Always kind, there was an additional gentleness in her voice and manner as she hovered about me, regretting that I did not go out enough to benefit my health. "You have not change enough," she said. "It is a pity you did not go with them to-day, as Mrs. Rogers went. There is only sameness in those drives with the colonel."

Perhaps Patrick had told her of Nora's delinquency, or perhaps she spoke from innate sympathy. None of the servants liked Colonel Demarcay except Patrick, and they, I fancy, pitied me for having so much of his society.

"I would rather be alone," I said somewhat ungraciously; and yet I was not thinking of her, but of the heart-isolation that seemed my inalienable portion.

"It is good sometimes, but not always," she answered. "Miss Everett took pains to teach me that there is a time for everything."

Yes, thought I, even a time to laugh, if one could find it—which I never can.

"A time to weep and a time to dance, a time to heal and a time to build up," repeated Adams, as if speaking to herself, though her comment was addressed to me. "There is also a time to pray. How comfortable to know that the Almighty always hears, that He is always at home, and never goes where we cannot find Him!"



## CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER Adams left me I thought I would go out. Passing Victor's dressing-room, the open door suggested a great temptation. Within was the portrait I so longed to see. This was an opportunity not to be lost. Now, or it might be never, could I see this idol—this memory that must ever stand as a separating wall between Victor and me. He kept it usually in his dressing-case, so I had heard from my maid. The house was still and empty, none of the servants were likely to come that way, and from the window I had watched the nutting party out of sight. Over the park they had gone towards the copse, into the green lane between red-berried hedges, where the bramble gloried

in its brightly-coloured fruit, and the hazel-stubbs had their coveted nut-bunches hidden among their leaves. I entered the room ; the dressing-case stood on the table, but locked, and no keys were near. Another door was open into the room beyond, recently prepared for Victor on the plea that he sometimes sat up very late at night, and did not like to disturb me ; so he said to Mrs. Dixon. I knew that he had been stung by my passionate reproaches, and preferred being alone ; besides, henceforth what could there be between us but distrust on my part, and indifference, no longer disguised, on his ? The veil had been rent too completely for either of us to deceive or be deceived any more. Feeling almost like a stranger and an intruder in my own house, after listening to make assurance doubly sure that no one was coming, I advanced into the farther room. On the table a small maroon *étui* attracted my attention. Touch-

ing the spring, it flew open, revealing a fair smiling face, delicate and young, with a profusion of hair that, even in the picture, seemed rippling with a gold sparkle among its luxuriant meshes. Had I not known of the existence of the portrait, the strong likeness to Hubert made it easy to recognize his mother, only fairer and softer, and with less character than her son.

It was some satisfaction to find only beauty in my formidable rival, being prepared on that ground to yield her the palm ; had there been much intellect or intelligence, I should have cried with envy. There was a certain feeble gratification in reflecting that the absence of beauty was a negative fault ; that if my lot on that point were fixed, I had some compensation in those gifts which time might increase rather than diminish. In this strain I tried to argue ; but it was cold work, and ran counter to experience. No prospective merit I might labour to

acquire appeared to me of much value, as I stood with this loved picture in my hand, which had so evidently often been, and was now, the solace of my husband's leisure. 'My heart was too full for me to repress its heavy sighs, or force back the tears that struggled to the surface in spite of my efforts to prevent them. Vain and useless I knew they were; besides, for my own sake, if for no other reason, I must endeavour to maintain a semblance of cheerfulness, even were the reality unattainable. The world would go on the same whether Victor and I were happy or not, and no great event would interpose with magnetic force to draw together those whom the wide chasm of a grave kept asunder.

That fair creature had not injured me; deep affection was her right; her pretty face and loving ways had made her husband happy—they were his due; hers also to be so deeply mourned.

What could I do other than I did ? I thought of the last few words uttered by Adams, who was a good woman, and wished to serve me. They came back with an echo of meaning. "He never goes where we cannot find Him." No. He is a present help in time of trouble. Where else could help be found in difficulties such as mine ? I asked to be enabled to accept dutifully my lot, and to dedicate my life to Him. It was a poor offering, and altogether barren of the joy that makes our service pleasing in His eyes ; but if He would take it as it was, or rather as, with His help, I might be able to make it, I should be thankful. Tranquillized by my prayer, being deeply in earnest at the time, I rose and went out, choosing a walk in a direction quite opposite to the one the others had taken.

Refreshed by my good resolutions, and by the air which blew softly into my hot eyes and over my aching brow, I went

on, almost cheerfully, over the short grass, from tree to tree, avoiding all beaten paths, lest by any chance I should meet with some one whom I did not wish to see. Not far had I gone when, missing my handkerchief, I remembered having had it last in Victor's room. To recollect and act were simultaneous. Glad to have so early discovered the loss, I ran back, looking neither to the right nor the left, into the house and up the stairs, through the open door of the dressing-room into the adjoining one, and snatched my handkerchief from the table. Heavy steps approaching startled me even as I grasped it, and in less than a second Victor stood in mute surprise in the doorway.

"I came to fetch my handkerchief," was my foolish answer to his inquiring eyes. Then, remembering this was no explanation of my presence in that chamber, I waited to be further questioned, vexed that the

colour so unusual on my pale cheek accused me of some special purpose or indiscretion. A few steps brought him close to me, and his first words were quite different from what I expected to hear.

"If I did but know, Ella, how you wish me to act——" he began, looking at me with a troubled face, in which tenderness and perplexity were mingled together.

"I have no wishes," I answered, shortly. His words seemed almost a mockery, although I knew he spoke them in all sincerity, so far was he from seeing things as I saw them.

"Believe me, Ella, the smallest wish you might express I should have pleasure in gratifying, if it lay in my power."

His soft, dark eyes for a moment met mine, which were fixed, and hard, too, from the effort I made to command myself. Not receiving any immediate response, he turned them away, and glanced at the table

where lay the books, the portrait, and the keys.

"I have none in which you can help me," I said, after a pause long enough to give full effect to my words.

Without noticing my ungracious reply, he came nearer, with the same gentle expression as before. My presence there was still unexplained, and must have puzzled him, though he acted as if there were nothing strange in it. Covering the portrait with one hand, he took up the keys, saying, "I came up here partly for these, having been obliged to return to the house to give an order I had forgotten."

"And I came to see that," answered I, putting down my finger near to the morocco case. "A foolish curiosity, was it not? But women are made so," said I, assuming an air of indifference; "they cannot help it. Mine is now satisfied, and no one is the worse for it. You may lock it up, that



likeness, or keep it there. I do not care to see it any more, nor shall I intrude upon your privacy again."

My tone was hard and hurt him, but it was hard for me to know that that little bit of painted porcelain would always be among his most precious treasures, cherishing remembrances fatal to my happiness.

With Victor standing there looking so sorry for me and speaking so kindly, it was difficult not to envy the wife who had made his life so happy and so sad. If hers had been a short one, it had been filled to overflowing with the best things that come to gladden the human heart. The wilderness to which some have likened this varied pilgrimage here below was full of blossoms and sweetness for her. Its tangled paths had been made smooth, and a tender hand had swept away the thorns and briars which cluster thickly in the way of many others. Heartsick I was, and bitter, too, against

a lot which a few minutes before I had prayed to accept meekly. The inconsistency did not strike me then, my better feelings being seared and withered under the baneful influence of envy.

I need not set down, even if I could remember, all that passed in that painful interview. The result of it was that I retained a settled sense of the injury and wrong that had been done to me, and a clearer view of the cold selfishness of those among whom I was thrown. Yet there was at the same time a feeling of self-blame, as I had certainly chosen my own position. For a portionless and dependent girl it might seem that the choice was not one to be wondered at. Few young people can be expected to forecast the dark side of the future. One purpose of a record such as I am now writing is to induce parents and friends to discourage engagements till all the possible elements of happiness or of

misery have been plainly presented and well considered.

Whatever my husband might now feel, my own path of duty was clear.

"Tell me your wishes, Ella," he repeated; "if you have none now, tell me them as they arise. If my uncle claims too much of your time——"

"Not at all," I hastily interrupted; "I am very willing to give it him; there is nothing else for me to do," I added cruelly, for at my first words an expression of disappointment gathered on his face. I walked to the door, he followed, and opened it with a resigned, respectful manner, as if further remonstrance were out of the question, or I were a stranger to whom the politeness was due. Relenting a little, though more on my own account than his, I stopped to say, "One thing you can do, which would be a real gratification to me; you can always strive to believe that whether I indulge or

reprove your little ones, I am acting for their good, to the best of my judgment. Adverse influences, as you already know, will not be wanting to suggest the contrary; but, in all common sense, I ask, what other motive can I have, when theirs is the only affection within my reach, and even that can only be obtained by time and perseverance? Promise to put that construction upon my actions, and I will promise that your confidence shall not be misplaced."

"I will," he answered, solemnly.

As he did not again open the door, which he had closed quickly when I began to speak, and was still holding, I put his hand away, and opening it myself, passed out, down the staircase, through the hall into the park, walking fast in the direction I had previously taken. Looking back, when a short distance from the house, I saw him striding along after the nutting party. He had some pleasure in prospect: juvenile

voices would be all the merrier at his approach, little feet would run to welcome him, and little caressing hands would be clasping his. What had I? Sternly stoical, I went on, still under the trees, stumbling into a trodden path at last, and out of a high wooden gate at the end of it into a green lane, where the dead leaves lay thick and brown, and the grass was tall and coarse. Here I walked swiftly from mere excitement with my undisciplined thoughts, my inward rebellion, and my fitful struggles against them. A small wicket-gate stood open on one side of me, and beyond, the path was divided into two, one branching off to the left, a short cut apparently from the high road, which as a white streak wound below to a house, whose gray roof was peeping through a group of tall elms.

From this point the green lane was so marked that it must be often trodden, and must lead somewhere in particular. Fol-

lowing it, I came to a spiked iron gate, set in a substantial wall, and looked down upon the sea through its bars. It lay in a glorious rest, and was of a greyish-blue, with only movement enough for the waters to ripple and gleam in silver furrows where the sun's rays sparkled and played. This was the walk the colonel had proposed taking me when I half offended him by going to church instead.

A zigzag path between rocks, scattered on the cliff, where the wild grass waved high and a few stunted pines tried to grow, went to the sandy shore. It was rather forlorn. I could understand Colonel Demarcay keeping the gate locked, and only visiting the spot occasionally ; still, it had an attraction for me. The seaside spoke of my uncle, and took me back to Rosewood. I shook the iron bars in vain ; the gate was locked, or I should have gone down instead of climbing a little knoll where the wall was

low enough to sit upon, and irregular rocks rose behind it.

Here was grandeur, sublimity, and peace, for the eye wandered over a broad expanse of water, spanned overhead by the pure blue arch, which seems to elevate our thoughts by drawing them towards the mystery that lies beyond ; those wondrous depths of water and space ending to the eye where the colours melted into each other, but infinitely vaster and greater than imagination can devise.

Distraction soon came in different ways : in the fishing-boats that plied their trade below, in whiffs of the salt breeze that touched my lips, and in the seagulls that skimmed the waves. I heard the gate clang as I watched them, and, looking round, saw Patrick with the key in his hand.

“ Do you wish to go down, ma'am ? ” he asked, approaching me, having already locked the gate after him.

## CHAPTER XV.

THE face of the old man, as he bared his head before me, was more ashen than white, gray as the few locks he yet possessed, and somewhat sad.

"Are you ill, Patrick?" I asked.

"No; that is, not more than common. Only I came up the cliff fast, and that takes away my breath."

He was pressing his hand to his side, which made me inquire if he were subject to palpitations or shortness of breath.

"Both. I suppose it is all the same thing. We wear out and can't be mended."

"Very often we can if we take our ailments in time. You must go to the doctor, Patrick."



He shook his head rather mournfully.

"The colonel would wish you to do so, I am sure. You must have advice," I persisted.

"I am old, ma'am, and a few years more or less, if that were all, would not make much difference. I never thought about dying when I was a soldier and the balls whizzed around me, but now I don't like it much. 'Man is immortal till his work is done;' the colonel often tells me so. That means that he has a day to die in as well as to be born. There used to be comfort in that when I was young and strong and never knew what it was to ail. Now it is drear and lonesome like to think about it, and the end can't be far off, and what is that?"

There was an anxious, listening look about him, as if he hungered for contradiction, and wanted me to answer him.

"How old are you?"

"Seventy-three."

"And hale and hearty on the whole, with the exception of this shortness of breath?"

"I don't complain, though I am not the man I was; only there is something here," touching his breast, "sharp spasms like, and I have bad thoughts at night."

My interest had been already more attracted towards Patrick than towards any of the other servants of Lorndale; there was so much kindness in his manner whenever he waited on me in his master's study, and now he regarded me with an earnestness verging upon the pathetic.

"Consult the doctor and let me know what he says. I will see that his orders are carried out."

Twisting his hat round and round in his hands, although I had told him to put it on, he said, almost timidly, "The colonel is uncommon clever, is he not?"

Without understanding the drift of his question I assented, and then heard a deep sigh.

"The colonel is a man of great reading," I continued, hoping to draw him on, seeing plainly that he had something on his mind.

"Ay, ay, so he is; the more's the pity. I was happier when I knew nothing beyond the little schooling I got when a boy."

"Are you a Roman Catholic?" I asked, fancying that I began to understand my companion a little better.

"No, I am not a Catholic," he answered, slowly. "I never was, in spite of all they say, though my mother was as good a one as ever lived. I don't say but what I went to the chapel sometimes with her when a small lad, and father was away. She taught me to cross myself, kneel down before the altar, and say an Ave Maria. That could do no harm, she said. My father was a seaman, and called himself a Presbyterian when he was at home, and not much of that. He paid for my schooling very willingly, and told me I might go to his church, but

not to my mother's. I did both when he was at sea, and heard different things, that is true, but I was rather the better than the worse for it, for often, instead of running into mischief with other boys, I used to think about what I had heard. Am I making too bold, ma'am?" he asked, looking wistfully at me as I sat with my face turned partly aside, my eyes involuntarily fixed upon the sea, whose ebb and flow has for most people a great attraction.

"Not at all. I am interested, and if I can be of any use to you shall be very glad." This I said, thinking that the outpouring of his thoughts, unchecked by fear of ridicule, might be a solace to him.

"I used sometimes to wonder when I was young if the Holy Mother did really pay attention to all the people kneeling round, and if she could hear them up in heaven," he continued. "When travelling with the colonel—for we once went about a great

deal—I watched and watched for some of the signs I heard talk of. Never but once did I see her move or blink an eye, and then it turned a little from side to side. It happened that a poor woman near me was praying for the life of her child, and took this as a token that her prayer was granted. Dragging herself on her knees close to the altar, she kissed the steps and cried for joy. I was glad for her too, and did not marvel that she went and spent her savings upon a large taper to burn in gratitude ; she was a poor peasant woman, and a few pence were a good deal to her. A great many others rejoiced with her, and we slipped a few small coins into her hand as we went away. When I told the colonel what had happened, he said I was a superstitious idiot to believe it. ‘And you don’t know that a few wires and a sponge applied at the back of the wooden senseless head would perform the trick ? Bah ! it is too clumsy to deceive a child,’

said he. After this I was ashamed to credit any such stories, and by way of regaining a reputation for common sense, I learned to ridicule them as he did. Once from an hotel at Arona, one very dry summer, we saw a grand procession. The Virgin, dressed in purple robes, was carried in state, with priests and boys singing, followed by a crowd of men and women. 'They are praying for rain, colonel,' I said, 'because the glass fell last night.' He rewarded my discovery by a smile, and I thought myself a sharp, shrewd fellow. It was my first venture in that line; but on such subjects mockery is bad. We went into Belgium, where every church had its relics, as they called them—bones, hair, nails, scraps of clothing, and all sorts of things, once belonging to men and women of blessed memory. I hardly liked to say I didn't believe them, but I did wonder how there could be so many, and how they knew they were the real thing."

“Did Colonel Demarcay take an interest in these things?”

“Oh, no. He sometimes examined the outside of a church, a window, or an arch, but I don't remember his going inside. He was fond of a bit of art. Once we went a long way, just for a whim of his. We drove down long roads, straight and paved, bordered with trees. I thought we should never come to the end of our journey. At last we began to wind about a little, and saw bits of hills, that the driver called mountains. A church, standing on a small island, was the object of our visit, with nothing very particular about it, as far as I could see. The colonel, however, having heard of some wood-carving especially good, wanted a drawing of it for himself. He was always like that; he would go miles for what took his fancy. An artist sketched it for him, and he had it imitated. It is now in his chateau over the sea.”

This digression broke the thread of Patrick's reminiscences. He stopped talking, and leaning against a tree, looked sorrowfully down at the ceaseless ebb and flow of the great waters below. There was nothing uncommon in his story; nothing to connect it with the mournful expression of his face, and yet an impression came to me that I could partly divine the cause.

"You were speaking of the colonel's chateau in Normandy; you mean that one where is the picture of the nun? Why did it affect you so much? Was it not because you believed it to represent a fact, and that fact you believed on testimony?"

"Ah, well! I am an ignorant old man. I feel things sometimes without knowing why. When young, I let many years go by foolishly and idly, and now it is too late."

"It is never too late to mend, Patrick; at least, not this side of the grave," I said.



"I had a wife and child," continued Patrick, without noticing my observation ; "they were cut off in a day, while I was journeying, feasting, and merry-making, fancying these the best things in life. I shall never see them again."

Dashing the back of his fingers hastily across his eyes, the old man muttered an apology for talking to me so freely, and was moving away, when I detained him. Here was a real tangible grief, deeper than mine, and, I greatly feared, a darkened mind besides. A great deal of the self-pity I brought with me when seeking this solitary spot was gone. It vanished before the sad fact of a soul in pain, and not for the sorrows of earth. Those, whatever their degree, have an ending. However poignant they may be in the morning, they are laid down at night ; that is, they are all put away when the frail body they tried so severely is gone to its long rest. Patrick's

sorrow seemed of another kind. Only just now, as I left the house, a prayer was on my lips to do some good, to lay down my own burden and help others. Was not this at once the answer and the opportunity?

"Every Christian man or woman may hope to meet their loved ones again," I said, emphatically. "There's a land where those who loved while here shall meet to love again."

Well I remembered my own dear mother: a pale, sweet face, at whose knees my first prayer was said. Her kisses seemed to fall on my cheek at night long after she was taken from me, and even now I often feel soothed by the expectation of seeing her again.

The cold, incredulous look upon poor Patrick's face was painful to see. A dim comprehension of his state of mind broke upon me, especially when, shaking his head, he repeated with a certain pathos, "The

colonel is a clever man, and all his friends say so."

I could not say otherwise, yet with the impression then strong upon me of his having exercised a baneful influence over this unlettered man, I longed to do something to shake it, not sharing in any degree the admiration and reverence that inspired Patrick. He was like a great dog, willing to follow his master anywhere, with this difference, that the faithful beast perils his body, and Patrick perilled his soul. Though desiring to open his eyes, I could only think of the trite remark, "Intellect is not always truth."

Silent I sat, not knowing what to say, and hoping to have loosened, if ever so little, his blind faith in a poor idol of clay.

"Do you never pray?" I asked, after a pause.

"Never much," he answered. "Sometimes, thinking a woman must be tender-

hearted, I just asked Our Lady to give me a little help when things went wrong, and it was better with me then than now."

"But if you make your prayer to God, you go to the fountain-head at once."

"I never did pray to dead men; I knew better than that," he said, without noticing my last observation. "Many's the time I have seen that done, and laughed at it, too. The day we went to the church about the carving a crowd of women and children were pressing round a shrine with a skeleton in it. Well I remember it, for they rubbed trinkets and handkerchiefs against the glass that covered it. A mother came with her daughter, and pushed the others aside; then the young girl, taking a ring off her finger, scratched it up and down. Poor soul! she was quite in earnest, trying to get some good out of the old bones; perhaps it was her marriage ring, and she hoped to bring a blessing upon it.

I knew a great deal better than that, yet the colonel would call me a Roman Catholic. I recollect his smile when once I told him I was a Protestant like himself. Dear! but he had a noble look about him sometimes, and a proud smile, too. And that picture at the castle—he would point to it when in good-humour, saying, ‘See, Patrick—see what your religion can do.’ This was a favourite joke of his to make me angry. Before he fell into bad health he was cheerful enough sometimes.”

“But as you say you never were a Roman Catholic, what did the colonel’s joke about the picture really matter?” I asked, finding Patrick’s confessions at variance with his assertions.

“Perhaps I didn’t know what I was, nor anything else, except to deny, like Peter. It would have been better for me if I had been one thing or the other. I used to listen to the colonel and his friends as they talked

together. In London at one time he gave dinners frequently. So many new things I heard, and thought them very fine. We servants had our meetings too and speechifyings. I liked best to listen. Most of the speakers I thought clever men ; and yet was not happy with them. Ah, dear lady ! it would shock you to know all the foolish things we said and did. I can't undo it now, and every day is bringing me nearer to the end : and if all these new things are false, and the old story is true, I am a lost man, and can never see my Katherine and her little one again."

The old man burst into tears, which I let him weep undisturbed ; such drops are sometimes as the rain that refreshes the thirsty earth, making it bring forth buds and blossoms of future beauty. I understood now his eager advice to me not to read the colonel's books. Though too much attached to his master to trace the mischief that had

befallen him to its real source, he nevertheless perceived that danger was near, and in his simple-heartedness sought to warn me against it. Poor Patrick ! his theology had never been either clear or extensive ; it was confined to a few superstitions, which it was more than easy to let slip when in contact with the master-mind that he worshipped. Had he stopped there he need never have sorrowed as he was now doing, some fragment would have remained. Even his floating creed was something ; it was far preferable to Colonel Demarcay's knowledge, for he had formerly some belief in the simple truths that bring peace, if not joy. From this he had fallen—or rather it had dropped from him, bit by bit, as tatters from a worn-out garment—and now he had not even the wretched comfort of his unbelief ! Some voice within that he could not silence denied it, and shook him with fear ; he knew that he had heart-complaint, and might be taken away any day.

"Have you never talked to Mr. Kingston?" I asked; "he will help you more than I can."

"There is no use in that; it would do no good; besides, all the clergy talk alike, the colonel says; he knows just what they are going to say before they speak."

It irritated me to see the faith of this poor fellow pinned to the fancies and theories of Colonel Demarcay. He could believe him to his own hurt, and was prejudiced against those who might have done him good, and, by an inversion of reasoning, just because the majority were agreed on the principal points at issue.

"What does the colonel teach you?" I asked, bluntly.

"He never taught me anything," said Patrick; "I used to hear him talk, and then we talked it over again, I and the other chaps, and no good did it do us. John Deans was a great man among us; he spoke well, he



did, but he got into trouble and was transported. If he ever comes back we shan't like to make friends with him."

"What did the colonel think of these meetings of yours?"

Patrick smiled. "He did not know anything of them, or maybe he would have liked best for me to stay away. He always says that religion is good for society. I never knew him to make a mock at it except when he joked me about the nun; but he has some wonderful ideas—when we die, we die, and that is the end of us. Don't read his books, ma'am, if I may make bold to say so, for though you may know better, something you don't like may abide. Sure, every man is the better for believing that there is another life after this, and a God who watches all he does, and who will call him to give his accounts by-and-by. Perhaps that poor John Deans would be here now, and a respectable man, if he had not doubted it.

And yet he knew far more than I did, and could talk almost as learnedly as the colonel."

"I hope you see that all his learning has not prevented him from becoming a convicted felon," I observed, as pointedly as I could.

"Just so."

"And that when a man has no belief in God or in eternity, there is little but the judgment of his fellow-creatures to prevent his becoming the same—little, from the highest to the lowest."

Patrick eyed me with a startled look. He probably guessed the intention of my remark, and listened as if weighing my words when I added, "What you have now told me, I trust you will never repeat to any one, except Mr. Kingston or some other who could help you. People might do less harm by throwing about firebrands. With them you only destroy life and property, but those who, by careless words, scatter seeds

of unbelief, endanger souls, and souls never die."

Though he looked wistfully at me, I remained silent on purpose. I was incompetent to deal with his mind, but I had struck a blow at the colonel's infallibility.

This conversation had roused my combativeness. Though far from divining Colonel Demarcay's real opinions, many of his expressions in our daily intercourse vexed and distressed me. Now I disliked him intensely. By heedlessness, to use the mildest term, he had robbed poor Patrick of the little religion he possessed, and shut him up in doubts that were worse than darkness. And my husband—what had this atmosphere of scepticism done for him? I was afraid to think, and in what I considered a righteous indignation longed to speak my mind to Colonel Demarcay.

As I rose soon afterwards, and began walking homewards, Patrick followed at a

little distance. An exclamation from him made me look about me.

“Mr. Demarcay Evans, I do believe!”

A young man, whom I could have taken for Victor had he been a little taller, so strong was the likeness, was striding down the path that led to the white road below.

“What was he doing here?” I asked.

“Hist!” answered Patrick.

We were not alone. Beside the small wicket-gate leading into her garden, which I was approaching, stood the striking figure of Miss Everett.

## CHAPTER XVI.

WITH her head turned towards the path, only a small part of which was visible, stood Miss Everett, in an attitude of deep thoughtfulness. Mr. Demarcay Evans was out of sight, but the regular firm footfall echoed on the ear as he descended the dry hard path. The rustling of my dress causing the lady to look round, our eyes met, mine troubled and shy from a feeling of having intruded upon her privacy, although unwillingly, and hers clear and pure, in whose depths was no guile.

“Miss Everett, I think, whose acquaintance I have so much wished to make?” observed I, advancing with extended hand. We were soon seated side by side on a

wooden bench outside the garden, and I was studying with interest an indescribable expression, which gave a nobler charm than that of beauty to her very attractive countenance.

"You have never called upon me," I said, reproachfully, when we had come to an end of the conventional phrases suited to the time, place, and circumstances.

"And therefore it is the more amiable of you to meet me thus kindly."

"Selfish rather than amiable, I fear," was my answer, "since I shall be the greatest gainer by having you for a friend."

It did not escape me that she made no response to my overtures of future acquaintance. She smiled sweetly, and suffered such remarks to drop like lead. Before long the conversation so flagged that, very reluctantly, I rose to go away.

"Will you not come indoors a little while?" she asked, politely.

My humble reply—"With pleasure, if I do not intrude"—was not, I knew, in accordance with Colonel Demarcay's views of our relative situations; but I had no pride at all, either in my name or position, and was gratified to be on friendly terms with Miss Everett, being more than willing to barter his good opinion for hers, if I could obtain it. We went through a small paddock or orchard, where fruit-trees, now rifled and shabby, filled the centre. It sloped downwards towards the house from the spot where I found her, and the road wound below, making, as I afterwards discovered, a great *détour* before the house could be reached by a carriage. One circumstance struck me. Though Miss Everett had accompanied her visitor to the outer gate, she had not returned to the window, whence she might have watched him through the windings for some distance. A small garden, where a fountain played and flowers yet

lingered, had been laid out with care and taste. It reminded me of Rosewood in its peaceful, pleasant aspect, and was, to my mind, a far more cheerful residence than Lorndale. Both within and without everything was in harmony with itself and with its mistress. A pure, grave taste prevailed in the furniture as well as in the ornaments; it looked like home, a home of peace and comfort, and yet that better thing which I estimated so highly, the presence of loving hearts, was wanting, for she dwelt alone. I thought her too beautiful and too young for this solitary life, and made some objection to it on the ground of her youth.

"I am twenty-nine in actual years, but feel far older than that," she answered, with a sweet smile that gave an angelic placidity to her countenance. "Owing to my mother's long illness, cares and responsibilities fell early upon me. I have always been happy, but not, perhaps, what is called young, if



you mean indulging myself in a full enjoyment of to-day without thinking of to-morrow. For many years, from one night to another, I never felt sure that my mother would be alive in the morning."

And yet, looking at her as she sat beside me, with her black robes falling round her graceful figure, and serving to heighten the advantage of a faultless complexion, I felt there was something better than beauty in her. Anna Demarcay's doll-like prettiness made me secretly despise those who worshipped it. I admired my husband's taste less after seeing the portrait, though I was not better reconciled to the lot he had procured me. To Miss Everett both judgment and heart were ready to offer homage. Serenity sat upon her brow, and her lips parted from time to time with a ready smile whose sweetness was most winning. If she were happy under circumstances that to a looker-on were dull and cheerless, why might

not I be? was my inward reflection. I could not obtain Victor's affection; but, failing the love of husband and child, was there nothing else to live for? Miss Everett was a proof to the contrary. God's sunshine can be in every heart that desires it, and when there, no atmosphere can be hopelessly dark. Care, regret, sorrow, affliction, all lose their hard outline under the influence of its invaluable rays. There are lessons everywhere, and precious ones too, if we could but learn them—both in nature and providence. The mother eagle compels her young ones to fly by putting a thorn into their nest. We may doubt the history, but the moral remains. Short as was my visit to Miss Everett, I felt the better for it, and promised myself both pleasure and profit in cultivating her acquaintance, intending altogether to ignore Colonel Demarcay's wishes, and not unwilling to defy them.

“You will come and see me soon, I hope,” said I, when taking leave.

"For a little while longer you will excuse me."

My face must have expressed a keen disappointment, for she added, in a hesitating manner, as if the concession were forced from her, "But if Mrs. Demarcay will pay me a visit instead?"

"With pleasure. When may I come?" said I, catching at the suggestion with an absence of dignity that would have shocked the colonel.

"My mornings are usually engaged."

"But in the afternoons?"

"I am less occupied then, if at home; yet I am frequently out."

That was the time I often had a glimpse of her sable dress going to and fro from cottage to cottage. Sometimes she was in company with Mr. Kingston, but more generally alone. We stood on different ground; my companionship was of no value to her, and hers was much to me; yet her

life was solitary, and mine—I lived, as some would say, in the bosom of my family—that is, within a circle of household ties. Was it my fault or my misfortune that they were inadequate to make me happy, and that the friendship of this stranger seemed a priceless boon, because all about her was sympathetic, while my surroundings were not so ? “Then I shall come and see you as often as you will allow me,” said I, as our hands fell apart.

Though longing to say how much I needed a friend, Colonel Demarcay’s image restrained me, and I went away as disobedient in spirit as Hubert, determined to avail myself very soon of the partial advantage obtained.

On reaching home I found the excursionists had returned. In the back hall were several signs of the afternoon’s amusement. Hooked sticks and baskets were on the tables, and leaves and bits of branches on the ground, which, a housemaid was sweeping away. I heard also that Mr. Demarcay

Evans had arrived. Unless Patrick were mistaken in his identity, Lorndale was the scene of his second visit in Halstead, and, if my observations were correct, the stiff figure, the firm, hasty step, hurrying away as if spurning the ground beneath, did not indicate that the first had been agreeable. Who was Demarcay Evans? Nephew to the colonel, the son of his sister, and therefore not the bearer of the family name, though a fiction of it had been preserved at the baptismal font. I knew also that he was clever, that he had given public lectures, and that he had some scientific reputation. He was a favourite with his uncle, which circumstance did not dispose me to regard him with particular interest, my wrath being yet hot against the man who, in my estimation, had so sinned against poor Patrick. Had he not, with unpardonable carelessness, poisoned the weak faith of this son of toil in the days when manhood was strong and passions

fierce, and given him nothing for his old age but bitter and futile regret? Surely, surely they who disturb the foundations of our trust, our hopes, and our happiness should give something more real, more stable, and more solid in their stead. Such was the indignant language of my heart, as with the vehemence natural to me where wrong was done, I longed to open a quarrel with him, and speak my mind. Not having any wish to encounter Grover, I would not go into the nursery to inquire how the children had enjoyed themselves, but remained in my room until it was time to dress and go down.

Though the fire burned brightly in the drawing-room it was not cold, and the moonlight streamed in through one of the uncurtained windows. Sitting in shadow at another, I was looking out where the silver radiance fell in lines and uncertain shapes on the turf outside, reflecting how to express my displeasure to the colonel, and how soon

I might, without indiscretion, repeat my visit to Miss Everett, when Victor and his cousin entered the adjoining room talking together.

I did not wish to be again an unwilling hearer of personal remarks, so, opening the piano, I gave notice of my presence by the preliminary of a few chords before beginning to play. Footsteps came immediately, and the shadow of two figures fell athwart the moonlight.

“Ella, here is my cousin, Demarcay, the Mæcenæ of the family. Lest it be a bad omen to meet for the first time in the moonbeams, I will change the light.”

Whilst speaking he applied a match to the wax lights on the mantel-piece, and I, quitting the piano, gave my hand and attention to the big cousin. On a close view the likeness to Victor disappeared; he was less handsome, and seemed made of sterner stuff. Power rather than goodness

was stamped upon his countenance, and yet the expression was attractive. Though he spoke only on conventional trivialities, his voice had a great fascination as we three stood round the fire before the others joined us. Victor was silent, and I, while listening, was silent too, piecing together into a history such facts as had already come to my knowledge about Demarcay, and making fanciful deductions from them. Miss Everett was a charming person in my eyes, in the colonel's less than uninteresting; might not the explanation be found in the fascination she exercised over the nephew? Hubert soon burst into the room, and running directly to his cousin, reproached him for not coming earlier.

"Why didn't you come—but why didn't you come?" repeated the boy, in various high keys, as he rolled himself on and off Demarcay's knees, yet ever returning to the charge.



"I could not."

My quick glance, as he now sat where the light of the lamp and fire fell full on his fine intellectual face, discovered nothing. It was not likely that he would be discountenanced by the idle questionings of a child.

"What train did you come by?" asked Victor.

"The three o'clock; but I walked from the station, having business in Halstead."

"Business! what was your business?" inquired Hubert, impetuously. "Your business was with us. We wanted you—papa, Aunt Bertha, grandmamma, Nora, and all of us. I shall punish you for not coming."

Climbing on the back of his chair, Hubert clasped his neck with both hands, for which he was tickled till he relaxed his hold, and lay shrieking on the floor.

"Hush! not such a row, Hubert. Get up, or you will shock your mamma, who is not accustomed to such rough boys as we are," said Demarcay.

Instead of repudiating the relationship with some outburst more honest than pleasant, as I expected, Hubert continued kicking and shouting until his cousin pulled him on to his feet, and apologized to me for the noise.

"Here is something for you ; I could not find fives, only threes," said Hubert, pulling a small substance from his pocket, and throwing it into my lap.

"Hubert !" exclaimed Victor, and very sternly for him ; "I cannot allow that," putting out his hand to take away what the child had thrown.

"It is a bunch of nuts, and meant for kindness," I replied.

"Hubert flings his gifts instead of offering them. Only princes are permitted to do that," said Demarcay.

"I am not a prince—I am Hubert Demarcay, papa's son, and I don't want to be any one else's," said the child, indignantly,

drawing himself straight upright, and looking a noble little fellow in the lamplight, as he always did when at rest instead of at play.

"I should like you to be a little more gentle sometimes," said Victor, laying his hand caressingly on the boy's head. "You will not be a true Demarcay in your uncle's eyes if you are rough."

"Nor a gentleman, if you do not learn something more than manners," added the big cousin.

"I hope you enjoyed your rustication this afternoon. I hear that Mrs. Rogers changed her mind and went with the party," said the smooth voice of Colonel Demarcay, as he bent low before me in passing on to his chair at the fireside.

"Very much," I answered.

"That's good ; why, you stayed at home," blurted out Hubert.

"No ; I walked in another direction." I said this, knowing through Nora's fit of

passion how he watched me, and how lynx-eyed he was to discern what appeared to him any deviation from truth.

"Where did you go?" asked Victor.

"I am not sufficiently instructed in the localities of Lorndale to give my walk a name, but I got into a green lane, and found myself stopped at last by the iron gate leading to the sea."

"Then you were close to Ivy Cottage."

Mr. Demarcay Evans turned his face quickly towards me, and as quickly away again. The entrance of Mrs. and Miss Rogers with Nora made a welcome diversion. Bertha's reproaches and questions met with evasive answers. He said no more about having been in Halstead on business, but set about making himself agreeable. Bertha flushed and smiled and looked more amiable than I had ever seen her before.

Both at dinner and throughout the evening conversation flowed on with a pleasant

sparkle like a gentle rippling stream that touches lightly the objects it encounters. Something of the colonel's sarcastic character was in the nephew, only of a finer nature, less cutting and more amusing. He laughed freely where his uncle would only have smiled, a smile that did not always please. Looking up once or twice from the work over which I was trifling, I found Demarcay watching me. To him I was an object of curiosity, if not of suspicion. Did he wish to ascertain how much I knew of his movements that afternoon? When retaliating by taking an occasional glance at him, I was convinced that much of his gaiety was assumed; there was a false ring in it, even when he jested.

"Marry!" he said, in answer to some laughing word of pretended dissuasion on the part of Bertha; "certainly I will when I can. Unfortunately, I am inclined to ignore the fitness of things, and have the

presumption to desire the possession of the best, and that is difficult to obtain."

If Bertha understood his meaning she was wisely silent. I was not. A reprehensible impulse urged me to say, with a sweeping glance that took in my husband as well as his cousin, "True, what is least valuable is the most easily procured."

"Probably it would be safest to adopt a new scale," said Demarcay, "and imitate the Frenchman who chose his wife to suit his furniture, a sure way of escaping discords and disappointments."

"Below the surface you would find them still," I replied.

"When the furniture is the worse for wear you can change or renew it. How about the wife?" asked Mrs. Rogers.

Bertha vehemently exclaimed against my dark views, and Colonel Demarcay observed that ladies frequently uttered sentiments solely because they thought them pretty.

“Permit me to express a hope,” he added, “that, however romantic and delightful a secret grief may be, Mrs. Demarcay will never find so keen a pleasure as that at Lorndale.”

Victor left the circle, and spent the rest of the evening lounging over the fire. What good had it done me to vex him by these side-thrusts? None; I had lowered myself, and that was all.

END OF VOL. I.









